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THE DAY OF THE CROSS

A COURSE OF SERMONS ON THE MEN AND WOMEN AND SOME OF THE NOTABLE THINGS OF THE DAY OF THE CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS

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By the Rev.
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A REVISED and enlarged edition of this book is published in response to the continued demand. The new sermons are those numbered IV., VIII., X., XIV., and XXIII.

It is a series of studies of the events of the last day in the earthly life of Jesus, and is an endeavour to reconstruct its scenes, to set its personalities in a revealing light, and to enter into the significance of their words and deeds. Above all, it has kept in view the interpretation of the mind of Christ, and of the supreme act of his service and sacrifice to God.

Glasgow, 1909.

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I.—CAIAPHAS

I.

CAIAPHAS

"And they that had laid hold on Jesus, led Him away to Caiaphas, the high priest."—MATTHEW xxvi. 57.

THE tragedy of the Cross is an event of a certain suddenness in the life of Jesus. The reader of the gospels has little forewarning of it. There are a few clear and arresting prophecies of it from the lips of Christ, but the events of the history do not seem to be marching toward such a consummation. Christ's popularity has laid hold on the whole land, has made Jerusalem expectant, and has raised ambitious dreams in the hearts of His disciples. It is not until He enters Jerusalem that the storm bursts almost out of a clear sky. In ten days all is over—the Son of God is crucified!

The reason of this suddenness is that Christ was crucified by the Sadducees. His great opponents throughout His ministry had been the Pharisees. They met Him at every turn, and strove to refute Him. But many of them were well affected to Him. One of them became a disciple; another laid His crucified body in his own tomb. Some of them may have thought it possible to win the brilliant young Rabbi of Nazareth to their ranks. The Pharisees alone would not have put Jesus to death. But the Sadducees, except in one instance, did not controvert with Jesus. They were the priestly party, and were to be found chiefly

in Jerusalem. Their lives and interests centred in the Temple. When Christ crossed their path, when His growing influence threatened theirs, when His leadership became a peril to their predominance, and His popularity a danger to their safety, they did not parley with Him. They acted. "They took counsel to put Him to death,' and rested neither day nor night until He hung upon the Cross. It was the Sadducees who crucified Christ.

Now the leader of the Sadducees was Caiaphas. He was the High Priest that same—that fateful year. The high priesthood had been the petty gift of all the foreign rulers of Judæa, bestowing it as their pleasure or their passion prompted. Caiaphas held the office for the long period of eighteen years, from the year 18 to the year 36 A.D. It was this high priest and leader of the Sadducees who was the chief agent in the Crucifixion of Christ.

Caiaphas stands out so clearly upon the page of Scripture that we cannot mistake his character. His unflinching and implacable enmity imprinted itself indelibly on the minds of the Apostles. In scene after scene he is distinctively drawn. We see him in the Council with the note of scorn in his speech, his easy mastery of the moods and fears of men, his bold, definite counsel. We see him in the interview with Jesus, rending his robes with histrionic fervour, in a finely simulated horror at the blasphemy of Christ. We see him playing his game with Pilate, and using that able Roman as his tool. We see him when Judas, torn with relentless remorse, bursts into the Council Chamber, turning away from the conscience-stricken man, dismissing the poor fool from his presence with a phrase. We see him, unchanged, when Peter and John stand before him, and he charges them to hold their peace. Who is this

resolute, defiant, merciless man? He is the high priest of God—the holder of the holiest office in Judaism. What is he? An astute and unscrupulous diplomatist; a wily manager of men; a master of assemblies with a fitting gift of speech; a conceiver of bold and daring policies in the hour when others waver, and a man of unflinching will in carrying them out. How shall we describe this man of the holy office, and the crafty speech, and the diplomatic skill, in a single word? In one word, he is an ecclesiastic —the type of all that long succession of men who have laid heavy burdens on every church, and often thwarted the purpose of God. Let us look at Caiaphas, the ecclesiastic, in the clear light that beats upon him from the Word of God, so that we may not enter into his secret or come into his condemnation.

I take three points of view—

First: The Ecclesiastic in his View of the Church.—Caiaphas, the high priest, was the virtual leader of the Jewish Church. We should have expected that his office would have lifted him above the baser passions. When the advocate, who may have been for years attempting to prove that the worse is the better reason, becomes a judge, he rises at once into an atmosphere of justice and impartiality. When the wayward youth enlists and stands in the uniform of the soldier, the fine virtues of obedience and courage and self-denial are born within him. To be high priest, to speak to God for men, and to speak to men for God, should not only have lifted a man into nobleness, it should have kept ever in his view the supreme purpose and the spiritual function of the Church of God.

What should the Church have been to Caiaphas? It should have been—as it had been in the days of the great

priests of the Old Testament—the channel of the revelation of God, the theatre of His grace, the pillar and ground of His truth, the source of the sanctities and purities which strengthen men for living, and comfort them in dying. It should have been as the very arms of God, underneath the weak, sheltering the oppressed, open to the erring. It should have been—especially in the time of Caiaphas—the sanctuary of a vexed and almost despairing people, the minister to their sorrows, the tender nurse of their faith and hope in God. The office open to Caiaphas as the interpreter of the mind of God, and the leader of the people in holy things, was to spiritualise their hopes, to teach them an unfaltering devotion to truth, and so enlighten their inward eyes, that they would have seen the beauty of Christ. Then these sad words might never have been written—"He came unto His own, and His own received Him not."

What was the Church to Caiaphas? It was an institution on whose history he could have descanted with eloquence. It was an institution he must preserve in its present form at all hazard. It was an institution with certain offices and ceremonies, and buildings, and privileges, and powers. And it was an institution in which he and his fellows held certain station and authority, and power and emolument. Whatever endangered its supremacy, whatever threatened to lower its prestige, whatever assailed its security, must be ruthlessly destroyed. A new revelation might be dawning among men; a new learning might be disclosing more of the power and wisdom of God; new methods of science might be stirring men's minds; a new and holier spirit of compassion might be surging in men's hearts; and all these might have been craving for recognition and

sympathy within the Church. It mattered nothing to Caiaphas, the ecclesiastic. The new wine would endanger the old bottle, and the old bottle was his precious thing. It gave him his place and his power, and it must be preserved. It needed only the cry in his ears: "The Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation," to rouse him to the strong, unflinching, merciless policy of the ecclesiastic.

Now, what is the source of the ecclesiastic's view of the Church? It is simply the spirit of worldliness—the spirit which prevails when faith in the unseen has died within the soul. That spirit of worldliness manifests itself in every sphere in life. When a Trades Union forms its laws and directs its forces only to further the selfish interests of its members and to exalt its officials; when a political party has ceased to care for the great principles it has inherited, and the supreme objects of its foundation, and devises legislation only to keep itself in power and secure the spoils of office; when a great industry loses sight of the higher interests it serves, and cares for nothing but the gain of its promoters, we know plainly that they have been seized by a crass and cruel worldliness, in which all that is high and holy has been forgotten. And when church leaders shuffle with truth, when they forget the greatness and the wideness of the Kingdom of God, when they resist every movement which may imperil the pre-eminence of their own particular church, then it is the spirit of the worldling that possesses them. They play the part and use the speech of Caiaphas, and their cunning plans bring upon them the very ruin they dread. Let us beware of the ecclesiastic's view of the Church. The Church is the society of men of God. It is the company gathered

round Jesus. It is the temple built by the living God. Its outward forms may change; the very form we love most dearly, with which our interests are bound up, may pass away. But let us be open to all light in regard to the Church and its forms and service, which may be the light of God. Let us be receptive of all truth that can prove itself to be truth. Let us cast away the thought that worldly power and rank are needful, and then we shall not only rightly conceive of the Church, not only further the interests of Jesus and His Kingdom, but we shall escape the sin of Caiaphas, the ecclesiastic.

Secondly: The Ecclesiastic in his Attitude towards Doctrine. —This man Caiaphas, although drawn with such almost unrelieved condemnation in the Word of God, must not be thought of as inhuman, or as a self-consciously evil or diabolic man. Louis XI., with all his cruel craft, had a conscience. Machiavelli, the prince of liars, had always his self-defence in readiness. Lord Chesterfield's letters seem to us so much polite villainy, and yet they were written in tender regard for the well-being of his son. And Caiaphas had men to respect him, perhaps to love him. Children climbed upon his knee, and he put his hand gently on their heads. There were some frailties to which he was not liable; there were many vices impossible to him. And you can believe that in all he did he was well persuaded in his own mind. The state of mind behind his policy, the reason that dictated his action, was his attitude towards doctrine. Towards doctrine, and towards any possible change in doctrine, Caiaphas did not keep an open, testing, discerning mind. He was as fixed as the ice of an Arctic winter, as unreceptive as the dead.

Now, in the Christian faith there are things which cannot be

shaken—the great proved certainties, the clear verities by which men have lived, and in which they have stayed their souls in the hour of death. In Christian doctrine, the Fatherhood of God, the Person and the work of Christ, the power of the Holy Ghost, the vivid realities of the new birth and the new life, and the eternal blessedness in the presence of God, are the unspeakably joyous certainties of the soul. But these may shine in new light. They may be seen to be more full of grace than we had conceived, and they may claim—nay, imperatively demand—a new statement at our hands. And as they are seen in clearer light, old truths, once deemed of paramount importance, may fall into a minor place, and things once held to be vital to the Faith be seen to be of little consequence. Towards these changing relationships, and this need of new statement, one of two attitudes may be taken up. The first is that of the open mind, which asks if it be true; which seeks to know if it be the teaching of the Spirit of God; which tries to prove all things, and to hold fast that which is good; which believes that there is yet more light to break forth from God's Word; which is sure that all truth shall show God's love more clearly, and more fully set forth His grace. The other attitude asks none of these questions. It asks: What will be the effect on the Church—on its peace, its organisations, its outward prosperity, its men of social influence, and on the Pilate of the day—the men and powers who hold its worldly pre-eminence in their hands? The first attitude has been that of all the great saints and teachers in the history of the Church. The unshakable creeds of the Christian Church are the words of spiritually-minded men who held fast the great certainties, and yet welcomed new light, cost

what it might. The noble band of the Reformers, Luther and Zwingli, Calvin and Knox, walked by the same rule. The framers of our Confession of Faith thought and phrased in the same principle of liberty. The other attitude has been that of every ecclesiastic from the time of Caiaphas. His attitude is determined, not by the truth of a doctrine, but by its effect on the Church, and on the place he and his fellows hold in it.

What is the word which marks this in the case of every ecclesiastic? You have it here in the life of Caiaphas. It is the word "expedient." This word expedient has its time and uses. There are things morally indifferent, and the only question is their expediency. But in regard to truth, in regard to the questions of the spiritual life and of eternal destiny, the word expedient should never be breathed. So here Caiaphas does not enquire into the claims of Christ; does not canvass and refute His doctrine; does not raise the question of its truth; but, with that subtilty which marks the ecclesiastic, seizes the opportunity of crushing the preacher and His doctrine by a single blow. "It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not."

Ah! are we not continually being tempted, both in regard to the Church and to the conduct of life, to adopt expediency to the peril of our souls? In public life men stand at the parting of the ways, and they refuse to face the truth. They slink off into the by-way of expediency, and anodyne their consciences with glozing speech. In business life men are sorely pressed—in the business of the preacher as much as in that of any other man. How we are all tempted to take the path which is only half honest, but is easy and profitable and self-exalting! In family life, in the

customs and habits of our homes, the training of our children, the choice of their occupations and friendships, again and again the expedient comes with its easy seduction. The expedient is Satan transformed into an angel of light. Ah, let me persuade you, as you remember the word and the deed of Caiaphas—whether it be in regard to the Church of Christ, or Christian doctrine, or the fashioning of your daily life—never to turn your back on a single truth, never to trifle with any conviction, never to regard your own place and exaltation, never to count the cost of loyalty, but to put down the temptation to expediency as the snare, not only of your well-being but of your soul. Think, when you are tempted, of Him who was also tempted by expediency. It assailed Jesus time and time again. In the wilderness, when the kingdoms of this world glittered in His sight; on the lips of Peter, dissuading Him from His cross; in the last agony of Gethsemane, when He held the cup in His hands, this temptation besieged His heart. And though He saw the cross as the only goal of the way of truth and duty, He set His face steadfastly toward it, and thereby He did the will of God, and, in a sense that Caiaphas's worldly heart could not have discerned, He set His people free, and gathered together into one the children of God.

Thirdly: The Ecclesiastic in his Conduct to Christ.—We have been dealing with the policy and the mind of the ecclesiastic, we are now going to search his heart; for it is your hearts that are searched by your conduct towards Christ.

Christ was well known to Caiaphas. This was not the first time that His work and teaching had been discussed in that Council. The cleansing of the Temple had been

one of the first acts in the ministry of Jesus, and the words of rebuke "My house shall be called an house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves," had neither been forgotten nor forgiven by the men who throve and grew rich on the unholy traffic. But that had been the act of One who was then regarded as an obscure zealot. It was prudent not to make too much of it, and of Him. But, now He had risen to prominence, His journeys had become popular progresses, His miracles had roused the wonder and His teaching had secured the faith and reverence of the people, and instant steps must be taken. This cool, cunning, crafty man saw in a flash that the watchful Roman governor would be only too glad to see in this popular clamour around Christ an outbreak of insurrection, and sweep away the Temple and its priesthood because unable to keep the peace. And with the passing of the Temple would pass Caiaphas and his pride. He stands up in the midst of the scared and bewildered men, who already hear, in anticipation, the shouts of the populace proclaiming Christ as king, and with keen scorn he says—"Ye know nothing at all;" and then calmly proposes to take Jesus and to put Him to death. JESUS!—whose poverty even the poor had pitied and relieved; whose mercy men with unloosed tongues had blessed; whose meekness had won children's hearts; whose gentle grace had evoked their praise; whose feet women had kissed; this Jesus he will put to death, and so rid himself of a danger, and make Him a scapegoat for the people. What is Jesus to a man like that? He is a pawn in his game, a tool in his hands, a stepping-stone to his ambition, a decoy to mislead his opponent. And that Jesus is to the ecclesiastic, whether, like Hildebrand, he sits in a pope's

chair; like Wolsey, rules a priesthood; or, in the dark days of a church, leads its General Assembly.

That is the decisive test of the ecclesiastic. The Church needs leaders. She needs men of wise counsel and prompt energy and determining speech. She needs men who will patiently and untiringly serve her tables. But the office they fill is full of giddy and dazing temptations. No class of men need more the continual reconsecration of aim and the fresh baptism of the Spirit. But these are gained only as men keep themselves in the faith and love of Jesus. The man to whom Christ is a name, or only an instrument of service, is a danger to the Church. But the man to whom He is Lord, in whose heart a deep devotion maintains its unquenched fire, may make mistakes, may seem to endanger sacred interests, but his blundering will be wiser than the cold prudence of the ecclesiastic. The great names in the Church of God, from Moses and Samuel to Wesley and Chalmers, have been men who lived in such adoring love to Christ, that they dared to break with the old order and lead men in new departures owned and blessed of God. Ah, had Caiaphas only known his Lord, what a wonderful page of grace would have been written in this gospel: "And they that laid hands on Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas. And when Caiaphas looked upon Him, and saw Him meek and lowly, he was deeply moved. And Jesus turned and looked upon Caiaphas, and in that hour his heart smote him, and his eyes were cleansed, and he saw the Son of God. And he came down from his high priest's seat, and took off the ephod he wore, and put it upon Jesus, and, being high priest that same year, he prophesied: 'Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world. Behold the King of Israel?' And

he kneeled down before Him and said: 'Thou art an High Priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek?'" Alas, there is no such scripture. Christ was only the stone of stumbling, and the rock of offence to him, on which he fell to be broken for ever.

We are not ecclesiastics, we are simple men and women, living our humble lives—desiring to know and to do the will of God. And yet Christ is a fate to us as He was to Caiaphas. In this House of God you have been standing face to face with Him. What is He to you? A name? An authority whose claims you also deny, or scarcely examine when they conflict with your ease, your pride, your state? Ah, look at Him again; listen to His voice. Let your heart's gate open wide, and the King of Glory shall come in. Now, as you sit, bow down in spirit to your Lord, and go out to do His will, and then, while your heart is filled with a new love for Jesus, you will feel it almost break within you for such pitiable castaways as Caiaphas, the ecclesiastic.

II.—PILATE

II.

PILATE

"And when they had bound Him, they led Him away, and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor."—MATT. xxvii. 2.

THE Councils and kings, the orators and law-givers of Rome, tower out in the backward look of history, when men nearer us in time are lost in the haze. But there is one Roman who shall outlive them all. He held only a petty post in an obscure corner of the Empire, but he sat as judge on Him who shall one day judge the world, and he delivered unto death the Prince of Life. The name of Pontius Pilate, the governor, shall be remembered when every other Roman name may be forgotten.

Of Pontius Pilate we know little more than lies upon this page, and yet a many-volumed biography could not tell us more convincingly what he is. There is no other who plays so large a part in the crowded day of the cross. The eye-witnesses have noted not only his deeds and words, but his gestures. They have been arrested by the solemn and dreadful fate which he was compelled to face, and they have been fascinated by his complex character. He stands for five or six hours in the light of Christ, and no man, then, now, or evermore, shall stand in that light without being revealed.

Pilate was a Roman of excellent birth and education,

with a Roman's imperial survey of affairs, a Roman's hatred of provincialism and bigotry, and a Roman's sense of law and order. He had a natural contempt for the Jews. Their narrowness and arrogance and fanatical violence roused in him a hard, decisive, military cruelty. He held them down under an iron heel. It was Pilate who scornfully and recklessly outraged Jewish sanctities by introducing the Roman Eagles into the Temple courts. It was Pilate who had cleared the streets of Jerusalem during a tumult by a charge of soldiery. It was Pilate, who, in a moment of suspicion, had fallen upon a band of Galilean pilgrims, and mingled their blood with their sacrifices. These deeds seem to us ruthless cruelties, but they are only the inevitable accompaniment of a watchful rule over a turbulent and unconquerable race. I pray you to remember that they are not one whit worse than the deeds our own Government has thought itself compelled to do in many a wicked and wasteful war in India and Africa.

But we are not concerned with the framework of this man's life. It is his spiritual history we wish to understand. And as I realise what this man was, as I see him so hardly beset, playing his unwittingly great part in the story, and missing the opportunity of eternal blessedness, I incline to think pitifully of him. He was a man of a quick and resourceful and thoughtful mind, familiar with the grave and wistful teaching of those classics you still teach your children. Think how high Jesus ranked him. He knew what was in man, and there is no man in all the Gospel story to whom He made a loftier revelation. Jesus would not waste a syllable on Herod. He had little more than a rebuke for Caiaphas. But for Pilate

He had a message of tender appeal, such as He might have given to Paul. Pilate's fine mind is seen in the strangely significant words he used. They burned themselves into the minds of the disciples, and they have a strange and prophetic power: "What is truth?" "Behold the man"; "What shall I do with Jesus which is called Christ?" "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews"; "What I have written, I have written" are all words of Pilate. But there is one tender touch in the story that lets us see right into his heart. There is nothing that more reveals a man than the character of the woman he makes his wife. I would not press this sociological law unduly, knowing well that there are exceptions to it, for many a man marries, in his hot, blind youth, some fair face behind which there is only a vain and empty and scornful heart, and all his life is a bitter sorrow for his blunder. But the law remains that the man expresses himself and his deepest desires in the choice of a wife. The face of Pilate's wife is seen only for a moment; the prayer of her lips is only a sentence in the record; but the face is that of a devout and reverent woman, the prayer is the breathing of one who could give noble wifely counsel; and the very fact that she sent her message to him, declares to us that here was a man in whose heart a chaste and holy love was abiding, and where love abides, God may enter in.

But there is something in a man deeper and more determining than his thoughts or his affections. There is his spiritual nature—the *quality* of his spirit. What can we say of Pilate when we think of his religious convictions? Remember he was born and bred amid the religion of Rome, out of which all life and reality had vanished. Its

priests smiled in irony while they performed its rites. The poets and prophets of Rome lashed it with satires. The people had ceased to do more than shrink before its gods in a half doubt, half fear. This man Pilate, like all men of culture and thought, had ceased to believe in the cruel and licentious gods of Paganism. And with that disbelief had come the usual disheartening conviction that nothing in all the spiritual world could in certainty be known. For in the moment when a man's spiritual world has vanished like a dream or a mirage of the desert, when the credulities of a young and ardent youth have been proved to be false, when he sees the men around him living only for things seen, what is there left for him but a sad and melancholy mental despair? "What is truth?" asked Pilate in the climax of his interview with Jesus, and Bacon tells us he jested. If he did jest, it was a bitter jest. It was the partly impatient, partly contemptuous, partly despairing word of a man who flings out a question to which he conceives there is no answer at all. And when we look at this well-read, widely-thought, bewildered, and gloomy-minded man, we find in him the type of men common enough among us. For there is no word to describe Pilate but one, and that is "agnostic." It is Pilate, the agnostic, who stands face to face with Christ.

I.

Now let us look at the agnostic in the light of Christ. We see Pilate in three scenes. Mark them well, for they are the steps in an agnostic's progress away from God. We see him in the grey dawn roused from his rest to hear the denunciation of those scrupulous Jewish hypocrites, who will not enter his house lest they should be defiled.

We see him with his Roman feeling for justice, refusing to do an act of summary wrong. And then we see him face to face with Jesus alone, and we cannot help a sigh that he did not know his Lord. He begins by thinking Jesus to be some Theudas or Judas of Galilee attempting another scatter-brained insurrection. But this discerning man, accustomed to look into men with keen and critical inspection, sees in a moment that he has no grim and furious fanatic here. Have you ever seen any man or woman in the day when a great sorrow was clouding the heart, or in the hour when a great sacrifice was exalting the spirit? Little more than twelve hours before, Jesus sat down at the supper-table and washed the feet of His disciples. He had lived through the evening in that atmosphere of love and peace which had culminated in His high priest's prayer. Little more than six hours before, He had spent His hour of agony in the pale moonlight under the olives of Gethsemane, and the waters of desertion and betrayal had gone over His soul since those solemn hours of the joyous song and the broken cry. And now He stands before Pilate clothed upon with the glory of His meekness and lowliness. The voice that answered Pilate's question was the voice of One who yearned for him, and held the door open to him. "Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of Me?" is the question of One who is searching Pilate's heart. For Christ's desire here, as always, is to lift all religious enquiry out of the heating and misleading arena of discussion and debate into the region of personal conduct and conviction. It is the attempt to lead the agnostic from his dialectic, to rouse the interest of his apathetic soul, and to make him face the realities of his own life. But it failed. Pilate is stung by the personal appeal, and the

quick retort comes back, with contemptuous scorn, "Am I a Jew?" But Jesus is love that will not let him go, and this clear voice, whose spell never men failed to feel, rang through Pilate's Hall in words Church-leaders have not yet fathomed, which spoke of that Kingdom not of this world—that kingdom not of the sword—but of the truth. He offered to enrol Pilate as a governor in it. Mark, He does not proclaim Himself as the Son of God. That would have been too high for Pilate, and this Teacher ever stooped to the little ones. He offers Himself as One who came into the world that He might bear witness of the truth. He touched Pilate in his tenderest memories and holiest thoughts, and took him back to the days of his youth, when he had dreamed his dreams, and seen his visions of unswerving justice, untainted honour, and ennobling purity. But the agnostic's habit has become too strong for him. It holds him as in a vice, and with the deep, unalterable conviction that Jesus is innocent, he puts his agnostic question "What is truth?" breaks off the interview, and passes out from the presence of Christ. When he went out it was the hour of dawn, but the night had begun to fall upon his soul.

II.

In the second scene we see Pilate, who has refused to make the question of his religious belief a personal one, become the man of shifts and devices. He goes out to propose Christ's release under a time-honoured custom of the Feast. But the shout for Barabbas teaches him that he has misunderstood the deep hatred felt for Jesus. A second device suggests itself to him. He will scourge Him—aye, mark you! with that scourge of thongs tipped with lead, every one of which bit like a scorpion—and mock

Him, for surely, even their pity will be roused, and they will relent at the sight of the thorn-crowned Man, and their rage will be glutted at the sight. But he might as well have fought the blinding spray of a winter storm, as have opposed himself to these hoarse cries of "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" He hurries in to Jesus, anew impressed that He who could so rouse the passions of men, must be more than He seemed, and "Whence art Thou?" he asks Him, as one might enquire at a spirit. But Pilate's question comes too late. Jesus will not answer. Truth which a man will not accept when it is offered to him, truth which a man will outrage by scourging and mocking, truth which a man will set at naught, that he may escape from a dilemma and avoid a duty, is always silent to such a question as Pilate's. If you will not do the plain duty that lies before you, if you will not take sides with truth and honesty, if you will not be true to the convictions you have, the hour will come, as it came to Pilate, when the higher questions you would fain put about God, and duty, and immortality, shall fall back unanswered. But Pilate, though darkness has settled down upon him, still keeps one point clear. He will not be driven to crucify Christ. But one man has been watching him, one man subtler and stronger than he, one man who understands his motives, and when Pilate's stubborn face meets these men who were hounding Jesus to His death, he plays his card. It was the voice of Caiaphas which cried: "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend." In an instant Pilate decided. He saw himself at Cæsar's judgment-seat, accused before an emperor, jealous of his loyalty, and at the first breath of proof condemned to exile or to death. Christ's face, Christ's innocence, truth, justice, honour,

his love of power, and his hatred of the Jews, fell almost out of thought at this word. What was one poor Jewish artizan, who could speak so marvellously about the truth, to his own safety and his own career? "He delivered Jesus to their will."

III.

The third scene is the dramatic moment of it all. It is Pilate—poor, fear-driven, unmanned Pilate—on the judgment seat, washing his hands in water, to declare his innocence, and so chloroform his soul. Ah, perhaps you think that no man could so deceive himself, that Pilate knew that he could have saved Christ if he only had bravely dared. No, that washing of the hands was no conscious mockery to Pilate. He doubtless went down to his house feeling himself justified, for he had reached the most abandoned state of the human soul. He was sinning against the Holy Ghost. I believe in hell; I believe that there is an experience in which sin turns upon a man, and stings him with an undying worm of remorse, and burns him with an unquenchable fire of agony. But there is a state lower than that. It is reached in the hour when a man can wash his hands in water, and think to purge away the sins of his soul. Our great dramatist has drawn us the picture of an awakened soul. He pictures Lady Macbeth, to whose senses an impotent sleep will come, but to whose conscience rest is evermore denied, walking in her trance and washing her hands. But the blood-red murder-stain will not leave her hands. "Out, damned spot! out, I say! Here's the smell of the blood still! All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand." You think that a scene of unapproachable

horror. Ah! for any of you here who have never agonised one hour, asleep or awake, over your sins; who have the supercilious agnostic's sneer at truths which bring peace and hope to others; whose consciences have ceased to feel even a twinge; who hush up your past, and wash your hands in some specious philosophy rich in easy excuses, or in a little religious observance—for you it would be better to walk at the midnight hour in unsleeping remorse, than to so stifle the voice within you, that you can eat and drink in that peace which is death.

How many are the suggestions that crowd upon us from a story like this! How certainly a man's present is an evolution from his past; how inescapable is the fate that falls on the man who will not confess his first wrong step and reverse his course; how pitiable is his state who will not be true at all cost to the light he has; how near a man may be to virtue, and glory, and immortality, and yet shamefully miss them all—these plain lessons force themselves upon us. But I have time for only one admonition. The chief lesson of the conduct of Pilate and its issue is the appeal they make to the agnostic. In a certain sense we are all agnostics, and we all should be. The ripest scholar, and the man of most patient and penetrating thought is willing to confess that all he has learned only tells him of unfathomed mysteries beyond his reach. He is but a little child, to use the simile of one of the greatest, picking up pebbles by the shore. Even in regard to the great Christian certainties, we must remain greatly agnostic. "We know in part," says the sublimest thinker of the New Testament. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be," declares its most open-eyed seer. But there is an agnostic who has made a special claim to the name, and has some-

times worn it as the badge of honour. To him, God is inconceivable, and immortality incredible. He decries, with some justice, the name of atheist. But the man who is not an atheist speculatively, is very often an atheist practically. The man who declares that there may be a God whom he does not know, and cannot know, is precisely, for all practical, and that is all real, issues, in the place of the man who affirms that there is no God at all. The modern agnostics differ in standpoint, in tone, and temper, and in conduct from each other. Some are hard, confident, militant, as are the scientific materialists. Others, and to this class Pilate belonged, have drifted into agnosticism through despair of attaining truth. Others are only indefinite and superior, as are the devotees of the many-minded philosophies. Others, and these are the largest class, are wistful, burdened, and eager to believe. Matthew Arnold speaks for these when he pleads:—

"Forgive me, masters of the mind!
At whose behest I long ago
So much unlearnt, so much resigned—
I come not here to be your foe!
I seek these anchorites, not in ruth,
To curse and to deny your truth;

"Not as their friend, or child, I speak!
But as, on some far northern strand,
Thinking of his own Gods, a Greek
In pity and mournful awe might stand
Before some fallen Runic stone—
For both were faiths, and both are gone."

To every agnostic, whether confident or wistful, to any man who is saying in his heart: "What is truth?" or questioning concerning Jesus, "Who art thou?" I preach

Christ—and I preach Him only as "the truth." Mark, I believe in Jesus Christ, the eternal and only-begotten Son of God. I believe in Him because He has spoken to me as surely, and as clearly as to those who walked with Him in the way, or lay in His bosom. And because I believe in Christ, I believe in God, and in the Holy Ghost, and the holy immortality of love, and rest and service hereafter. But now, I appeal to you, to consider Christ, only as the truth. I proclaim Christ as the truth about yourself; if you will know what you should be, what you are in the very purpose of your being, look patiently at Him. I proclaim Christ as the truth about your life. What your life should be in justice, and honour and purity, in all loveliness and grace of temper and speech, in perfect wisdom of sympathy, and swiftness of help, you find declared in Christ. I proclaim Christ as the only One who will tell you, in a message quick with demonstration, about that inner, and real, and eternal world of your soul. Do not lift your thoughts for the present beyond these proved certainties—these "earthly things," as Jesus called them, to Nicodemus. And now, I ask you to join Christ, as He asked Pilate, in being a witness, in every sphere of your thought and life, to the truth. I ask no more now, because Jesus asked no more from Pilate. This revelation of the truth in Christ need not be debated or argued. Help does not come that way. It is moral and spiritual truth, and its only sufficient test is life. "Every one," said Jesus to Pilate, "that is of the truth, heareth My voice." If you are willing to be true, if you will dare to stand for the truth at all cost, you will hear and obey the voice of Jesus. And when you have lived out whatever truth has found you, your horizon will widen, and your vision will become

more vivid, and all the satisfying width and wealth of the greater revelation in Christ dawn upon you. God and His grace, the burden and stain of your sin, the endless significances, and the marvellous power of the Cross shall become sober certainties. The day shall come when you will sit down at the Holy Table, and I shall give you the Cup, and you shall give it to me in token of our common feast and fellowship in Him "Who hath loosed us from our sins in His own blood." "He that is willing to do the will of God shall know the doctrine, whether it be of God."

In faith and love I preach this elementary but sufficient gospel to you. Yet I cannot cast out a fear that many will come to pitiful disaster, as Pilate did. He stood then where you stand now. The sweet mysteries of Christ were dark to him, and he was not asked to accept them. But because he would not be true, because he would not live out the truth he knew, because he allowed truth and innocence to pass to shame and to death, he also passed out of Christ's light, and bears an eternal shame. What hindered him? It was in one word, his *interests*. He feared for his worldly interests. Caiaphas knew his man; Caiaphas had but to bring his worldly interests before him, and he did that deed of wrong from which every true thought shrank. That, in many forms—some as coarse and sordid as assailed Pilate, some as subtle and refined as seduce the man of wavering and bewildered mind among ourselves—is the temptation of the agnostic. It may not seem so with many. It is truer than it seems. The men who have had dreams of following Christ in what He has appealed to them of truth, and have not done it, have been held in some bond like Pilate's. Their position, their credit, their career, their pride, their fear

of their master—the present world and its judgment—have made them pause. With others it is the offended form of a patron, a client, a customer. It is the endangering of some real and visible and earthly good which turns away men's eyes from the light, and so they pass to the agnostic's doom.

Ah, think of the loss of it all! In the greatest Christian creed the sweet name of the Virgin Mary, who made the costliest sacrifice that ever was asked of a human spirit, is followed by the name of Pontius Pilate, who committed the agnostic sin of being false to, and careless of, the truth as it passed before him. As often as we recite, "Born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate," we are repeating the judgment and verdict of history. But there is a more awful judgment than that of time. In the eternal light all things shall be made manifest. In a very true sense Pilate has been standing at Christ's judgment bar since the hour he dismissed Him from his presence. It is in Christ's searching light we see this agnostic's troubled spirit, and understand his craven decision. But when he shall stand before Christ's open face, when he shall know himself as he is known, who shall so scorn himself as Pilate, the agnostic?

III.—HEROD THE TETRARCH

III.

HEROD THE TETRARCH.

"As soon as Pilate knew that He belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time. And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad."—LUKE xxiii. 7, 8.

THE student of the artless and strangely passionless story of the Cross notices many marvellous things which escape the less observant reader. One of them is this. All the actors in the drama of the Gospel history seem to be compelled, as by an inexorable fate, to appear on the stage in the last scene of all. Sadducees and Pharisees, governors and priests, disciples who were loyal to Him and disciples who were base, men who loved Him secretly, and women whom nothing daunted—all pass into His light, and in the passing receive their judgment. Here is Herod, who belonged to Galilee, who scorned Judæa, and detested the Jews, who was at enmity with Pilate, and yet "he also was at Jerusalem at that time." And here is Herod who had never seen Jesus, though with a vulgar curiosity he had often desired to see Him, who has had little to do with Jesus, though he had played his part in the Gospel story, and yet because Pilate, with the astuteness of the trained lawyer, saw his way of escape from being the judge of Jesus, under the plea that He "belonged to Herod's jurisdiction," Herod also is brought face to face with Jesus. He stands for only one half-hour in Christ's presence, but as he stands we see into his very soul. It is

not the deft conjunction of the writer of fiction—not the artifice of discerning literature. It is the finger of God.

Let me tell you the story—not of the man's life, but of his soul. Let me tell you in a word what he is, that we may have the key of it all from the beginning. Let me not lead you to think one thought of him more hardly than you ought. He was a man of good birth, although, like many other such men, with a dubious ancestry, if you go back far enough. He was a handsome man, of graceful address, with a naturally sunny temper, fond of gay trappings and of dainty living, with the constant tendency of such men to give way to appetite. He had no strength of mind or will. His one strength was the fury of a profligate's passions, a strength which many weak men share with the brutes, and, like so many of these men, he had a fatal fascination for women. But he was more than a splendid animal. He was a man of artistic temperament, with a fine taste in music and a discerning eye for colour. He was full of political ambitions and eager for place and title. He did not live aloof from his time, and he felt the better impulses which were moving and stirring men in Galilee. He had his code of honour, and shrunk from breaking his word; he had his hours of tender feeling and his moments of compunction. He had his religious opinions, and had naturally become a Sadducee, and he could break a lance in a theological discussion. But only lift your eyes from the pleasant face of this high-placed, polished-spoken, passion-driven, and superstitious man, and look into the spiritual world; only think of some face radiant with the sheen of holiness; only recall some voice pleading with God in well-accustomed prayer; only think of Jesus and His grace, only whisper this one word,

God, to your own heart, and then look at Herod, and you see right past his wine-flushed skin into the soul of him, and you see him to be in one word—a worldling. The story of Herod in the Gospel page is the history of the soul of a worldling.

Herod Antipas was one of the many sons of Herod the Great. That Herod was the man who murdered his wife who had sacrificed everything for him, and his two sons, who faithfully served him, and in his closing days lived in an atmosphere of jealous and vengeful blood-thirstiness. The massacre of the few innocents at Bethlehem was only a detail in a career of ruthless butchery. He was a man who could pretend to any religion, or make the more truthful profession of having none, as it best suited his purpose. But he professed the Jewish faith, and his children were trained in Hebrew learning. The Herodians were the party in the State who were willing to accept him as the promised King of Israel. Without committing ourselves to any confident conclusions as to the complex laws of heredity, we may allow that young Herod was not born in a saintly succession. Certainly he was weighted by tendencies in his blood, which would have made a holy life a sore struggle through all his years. Yet he reached manhood devoid of the tiger cruelty of his father; perhaps, by a natural reaction, revolting from it; open to suggestions of better things; at times moved by a dim vision of good. He was a type of young manhood very common among us. You know the young men who are born and nurtured in the homes of successful men of the world, whose Church connection is chosen because of its possible aid to their professional or social advancement, whose inner life is an impatience with God. You have marked the youth who

comes out of homes like these—a bundle of tastes and acquirements and opinions, a dabbler in music, a haunter of places of pleasure, indifferent to the great inspirations of aspiring souls, a Sadducee in his religion, and underneath it all a flood of licentious passion throbbing in his veins. As you see him, still open to influences of goodness and piety, still to be determined in character, drifting into apathy, you fear and yet, as you know, one brave decision would reverse it all.

The hour of determination came to this young worldling as it comes to all. He had to accept his poor share of his father's dominions with unconcealed chagrin, as such a youth among us accepts the scanty provision of his father's will, but he had administered the affairs of Galilee with only the usual Oriental oppression. He married most suitably, and began to court the favour of Rome, building Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee as his capital. But in an evil hour his eyes fell upon his brother Philip's wife, Herodias. Then the worldling heart of him craved for its gratification. The story of his struggle is not told us; in all likelihood there was little or none. The pride of his wicked heart, swollen by his passion, would sweep away every barrier of thought and feeling. But when he had taken her, not only the world without, but the world within, had changed. Ah! you can understand it. You have marked the worldling; you know that no prayer is ever found on his lips, no reverences ever thrill him in his hours of silence, no holy ideal ever allures him to blessed experience, no thought of how near God can come to a man ever amazes and humbles him; but he has at least kept himself clean. He has run the gauntlet of temptation, and can lift honest eyes to men. But there comes

the hour when he falls; when, for ears that can hear, his speech has a grosser accent; for eyes that can see, his brow has a shadow of shame, for there shrinks within him that poor, defiled, darkened spirit—the spirit of the man who has "taken his brother's wife"! For that is the sin of the worldling to-day as clearly as it was the sin of Herod. Let us make no superfine, unfair, excusing distinction. Our worldling youth, after his sin, stands just where Herod did after his. But then there comes the amazing mystery of the grace of God. Then the worldling soul awakes to some realities of which he had not dreamed. Then that sweet land of innocence he has for ever left behind seems inexpressibly fair. Then a clean heart is no mere word of ancient psalm, but a consummation most devoutly to be wished. Then the word of the preacher acquires a new significance; the unwitting counsel of a friend a startling fitness; a simple text flashes out as though lit from behind; a hymn of aspiration cannot be sung. So was it with Herod when his sin, as a man's sin often does, stirred the worldling heart within him. It was because this man had his burdened conscience that the religious revival, which was beating in so many young hearts in Galilee, became a thing of deep interest to him. It was because he had his uneasy spirit that he sought the companionship of so unlikely a court preacher as John. It was because he had his wounded spirit that he observed him, and did many things gladly, that he might get an anodyne for his pain.

Oh! if any of you have had the long, indifferent, Sadducean, worldling heart within you awakened even by your sin, if any of you have made your bed for one night in hell, let me beseech you to look at this worldling now. His

preacher was too wise to salve his wound with easy words. His preacher was too kind to palliate his sin, and his preacher was too loving to have any thought but to save him from death. He probed his wound. He cut into the quick, and the words came clear, abrupt, decisive. "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife." The preacher was shut up in prison, but you cannot imprison words, and a man's conscience has that curious power of the echo, and will give back to his very ear the words of a message long after the voice that spake them is still. I see Herod in this life-and-death struggle in three scenes. I see him first walking alone, in the calm, Syrian night, on the terrace of his castle at Machaerus. He has come out to cool the fever of his spirit. All Jordan valley lies gleaming at his feet; the stars are shining in their serene obedience over his head. Simple men and women are sleeping in peace in the quiet homes of every hillside. In the dungeons under his feet, the prisoner, whose words will not away from him, has hushed his doubting spirit by prayer, and is dreaming his pilgrim's progress home to God. As Herod paces up and down in the awful loneliness of his sin, John's lean, ascetic face, his eyes of discerning righteousness, his voice, with its note of longing, even when he smote him, and all the strength and spiritual bearing of his holy life, comes in upon Herod. And, as I listen, I catch what is almost a prayer upon his lips, and a feeble, yet living resolve is born within his will. I see him again when midnight is past, lying sleepless by the side of Herodias, arising and looking at her hard and haughty and sensual face, even in her sleep flaring with pride and security. And I hear him cursing the day in which he met her—and the feeble resolve within him grows to

strength. But I see him again in the morning, when the sun is lighting up every hill and valley, and his courtiers are round about him, and the woman is there, with her grace, her witchery of speech, her mocking laugh at righteousness —and the resolve faints within him. But a struggle like this cannot go on. The woman's unerring instinct gave her the understanding of it all. The banquet is made, the poor worldling is fooled and flattered by cozening speech. He is half bemused and half maddened by wine, and the crafty Herodias, who knows his besetting weakness, sends in her dancing-girl. Herod looks on with delirious pleasure. John, his own sin, the voice of his conscience, his feeble, unfed resolve, are blotted out, and the braggart oath is on his lips. When the request for the head of John the Baptist falls upon his ears, he is stunned for a moment. But he makes his decision, and in an instant—for there are sudden destructions as well as sudden salvations—he has cast away his soul. It was that experience which Tennyson has set in the unforgettable words of a perfect insight, when he tells the story of Merlin :—

> "Then, shrieking out, 'O fool!' the harlot leapt
> Adown the forest, and the thicket closed
> Behind her; and the forest echoed 'fool!'"

But the worldling is not yet complete. Sin has its finished work as well as grace, and sin when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Herod's decision might have been reversed, although it would have been a long way back. Strait is the gate and narrrow is the way that leads unto life, especially when a man finds it blocked by some awful and deliberate fleshly sin. Yet the remorse

which was quickened into fear, and the conscience that made the Sadducee tremble with coward thoughts when he heard of the fame of Jesus, are evidences that repentance might still have been born within his soul. But remorse is always a tender plant. It can be quickly torn up by the root, and it is easily blighted; and Herod drifted day by day, and month by month, until the tiger in him also awoke, and he was ready to shed Christ's blood. The man had become "a fox" in aim and in temper, and as the years passed by, and his world still went round, even his conscience sank into a peace like that of a stagnant pool. It is this Herod on whom Christ's light shines for one brief half-hour. This Herod, who had reverenced John, who had seen the halo round his head, who had felt the strong rush of holy desire in his soul, who now looks on Jesus, the Son of God, the Lord of Glory, whose spiritual beauty was a rebuke to sinful men, whose grace made them bold with hope. But he had no eyes to see it. He sees in the Son of God a diverting show, a conjurer who may do some petty tricks. He puts his gross and debasing questions, and, marvel of marvels! Jesus answered him nothing. Do you understand the significance of that? Jesus, who was willing to reason with Caiaphas, and waste a great prophecy on him; Jesus, who will plead with Pilate, and almost sway him from his sin; Jesus, who will grieve over Judas, and try to melt him with words so gentle, that we are in a constant maze because He did not break his heart, yet keeps that dreadful and ominous silence to Herod. Why? Has Jesus forgotten to be gracious? Is He no longer to be moved with compassion? No; the reason is sadder still. The capacity for holiness has been extirpated, the man

has become despiritualised. Jesus will not cast pearls before swine. He had his time of promise; he comes to his time of decision. Now he is the completed worldling—"Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone."

From a story like this, not only lessons of arresting import, but great spiritual truths, shine in upon mind and heart. I cannot keep you to speak of them. I have no time to speak of the hopefulness of that hour of promise, which even the worldly soul must surely know, when God's Spirit touches him to urgent thought; or to urge upon you the peril of trifling with religious convictions until they shall cease to trouble you at all; or to press home the neglected truth that there is no baseness and no dull misery to match the worldling's who can still remember happier things. One truth and its lesson would I urge. It is this: that the *moment of decision for Christ may be one in which no word of Him, no thought of Him, and not even His name shall be consciously in your mind.* There are, I doubt not, many of you here who can look back on the hour in which you were conscious that Christ was appealing to you, presenting Himself in His grace, and with His sweet coercion compelling you to accept Him. You count the memory of the date and place as one of your eternal treasures. It may have been in this Church, when the preacher's voice was calling to decision; it may have been in some meeting, when the Spirit of God was poured out, finding a willing people in the day of His power. Perhaps as you read the Word in private, or walked and communed with your heart, Christ met you, and in the silence, then and there, you made your covenant. Blessed are ye who have so consciously washed your robes, and have entered in by the gates into the City! But it is not so

with every one—nay, I venture to say, it is not so with most. Christ comes to us, not only in our worship, not only in His Word, but shrouded in our circumstances, hidden behind the veil of our neighbour's face, speaking through the tempting words of those whose wiles glamour us, calling in the counsels of those who rebuke us, and again and again "there standeth one among you whom ye know not," and we are compelled to make a decision for Him or against Him. Herod Antipas never saw the face of Jesus until that last fruitless half-hour. Herod Antipas never heard His voice. Herod Antipas never had Christ preached to him. No! but in the hour when he trifled with his convictions, in the hour when he chose to keep his braggart oath to Salome, the dancing-girl, in the hour when he made the decision which had its awful consequences—he decided against Christ. He made that decision which ranked him with the men of pride and lust and murder, and when he comes into Christ's presence, the hall-mark of hell is on his face. The decision which determined his fate was made years before he saw the face of Jesus. It was too late then, Christ had no word for him.

So is it in our day. Here is a man who in his business faces a daily temptation. How it meets him hour by hour! How he questions himself about it! How he debates the issues it raises! Christ is not in all his thoughts. The thorn-crowned face does not rise up before him. The word of Christ does not leap into his mind. He does not dream he is standing at the parting of the ways. Yet, as he makes his decision for truth or against truth, for purity or against purity, for righteousness or against righteousness, he is making his decision for Christ. Here is a young woman to whom there comes a

tempting opportunity in life. She sees an avenue that will lead to much she might naturally covet. It will take her out of uncongenial surroundings, make her life one of ease, gratify a host of desires. But it has conditions she must fulfil, at which her quick conscience protests. Ah, how she questions and searches herself in hours of sleeplessness! No thoughts of Christ's cross may visit her; no remembrance of the toilsome way His feet walked rise before her. Yet she, also, is standing at this parting of the ways. As she decides for honour as against dishonour, for duty as against soft ease, for her cross as against the false way of escape from it, she is deciding for Christ. Perhaps in some house of prayer, or in some quiet lonely way, as these two ponder the explicit call of Christ, they may bow their heads and yield themselves to Him, and in years to come take their children aside and speak to them of that solemn hour when Jesus called them. Ah, it was not in that hour, when they stood consciously in Christ's presence, that the decision was made. That was the hour which registered and sealed the decision. It was in the hour, months, perhaps years before, when they fought their battle with their temptation, and made their brave decision. The face and presence of Christ revealed to them, as it revealed to Herod, what had been done.

With what an awful sanction is this question of instant, faithful, daily decision pressed home! It is this—that the hour may come when Christ shall be silent to us. My human heart almost fails me when I preach a truth like that. And yet truth it is. I can tell you of the grace of God. I proclaim to you that no man is too hoary in sin to be saved. "His mercy endureth for ever." "He

is able to save to the uttermost." But let no man cheat you with any evangelical lie, or coerce you by any theological logic, and blind you to the plain facts of life, and the testimony of the word of God. For the truth is, that a man may become so complete a worldling—aye, when his eyes stand out with fatness, and he has more than heart can wish, when daintiness waits upon him in his home, and public banquets are made in his honour—that no word of Christ, no call to goodness, to prayer, to faith, to God, can ever, through his grossness, reach his soul. Oh, there is a holy sorrow which is touched with hope when we stand by the grave of our dead. There is a purifying sorrow which is touched with tender charity when we see a man making a noble, though fruitless and unavailing struggle in life. But the sorrow which is darkened by unappeasable regrets, and haunted by despair, is the sorrow for that human soul which has felt how near and dear God and goodness have been—and yet is now coarse, carnal, godless—a worldling soul, to whom no word of God ever comes.

"Unto Thee will I cry, O Lord, my Rock: be not silent to me, lest if Thou be silent to me, I become like them that go down into the pit."

IV.—FORSAKING CHRIST

IV.

FORSAKING CHRIST.

"Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled."—MATTHEW XXVI. 56.

IN a great piece of music a composer strikes the note in his prelude which is to be recurring and dominant,—the keynote of his message. This grave and saddening line is the keynote of the story of the day of the cross. It was a sign, as Jesus had foretold, that his hour had come. It was his first step down into the waters of his baptism of sorrow. It was his first draught of the cup. To be forsaken by all turned his pre-vision of the cross into an experience.

To forsake Christ is not always to desert Him. To desert is to play the apostate wilfully, callously, and impenitently. The names of the deserters call up the spiritual tragedies of the Scriptures. Esau selling his birthright, Balaam making common cause with the degraded Moabites, the men who went back from Christ and walked no more with Him, like chaff blown away by the winnowing fan of his austere and spiritual demands, Judas Iscariot who betrayed Him, Demas who loved this present world, these are the deserters. But to forsake Christ is to turn the back upon Him in some hour of trial. It is the disloyalty of the fearful and overtempted. It is the sin of the day of discouragement and despair. All

Christian men have so yielded in days of strain. Jesus has always been the forsaken Christ. Even the men whom we revere because they have worn the white flower of a blameless life know of their mutinies against goodness and truth, and their disloyalties to the highest and the best, when they have turned their back on Christ. It is written not only of Peter and James and John and their fellows, but of all who have named Christ's name, "Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled."

Now, with the story of the garden before us, let us look into this forsaking of Christ. Let us see the reasons why men are disloyal to Him, and mark how we may be safeguarded against the sin.

I

In the first place, *men forsake Christ through fear.*

We understand at a glance the fear of these men. They were Galilean fishermen and strangers in a large city. They were surprised at night in the depths of an olive garden. The sudden Roman faces, with Judas at their head, the flashing lamps and gleaming spears, the rough and insolent soldiery, Christ captive, submissive, seemingly helpless in the soldiers' hands, death menacing themselves in the rude gestures of their assailants, shook their nerve and blanched their courage, and they forsook Him and fled.

Now Christ is always being forsaken through fear. He has been often forsaken through fear of death. He has been more frequently forsaken through fear of what flesh and spirit may suffer, of what life may lose or may fail to gain. We do not stand beside Christ in the

shimmering moonlight falling through the trees of an olive garden as He faces a regardless mob. But we do stand beside Him facing the world's scorn and censure and power to rob us of what so often makes life sweet. When for the sake of our profit and our ease, or our worldly security and comfort, or the countenance and approval of the rich and the prominent, we forsake what is true and pure and unselfish, we forsake Christ. When we refuse for fear of the loss of a good name and powerful friends and the soft pleasures of the world to stand for the causes for which Christ died, we forsake Christ.

You know how that trial of fear smote the hearts of the men of the early centuries. When the storm of persecution broke over the primitive church, they were asked to abjure Christ's name, to take part in the public festivals of the Pagan god, to cast a little incense before the statue of the Emperor, and, when they hesitated, they were shown the chains with which others had been bound, or taken to hear the roar of the lions. Then many of them forsook Christ and fled. When the Reformation of religion was the hope and passion of a few strong and devout men many gave in their names as adherents, and they throbbed with a pulsing enthusiasm for its watchwords of truth and freedom and purity. But when they saw the frown on the faces of those who sat in authority, when they marked that the powers of hell seemed to be gathered against them, and when the fires of St. Andrews and of Smithfield were lit, they fell away in fear. They forsook Christ. In every land, and in every struggle for simplicity of worship, for liberty of conscience and for the rights of the soul, there have been men and women who have seen the truth flash out, have marked the path of duty, and have been beckoned

to a self-sacrificing chivalry, but when poverty and prison and death threatened, they forsook Christ and fled.

In later years and in softer ways men have been assailed and have yielded. In the cold and sceptical eighteenth century, when Wesley was gathering his thousands at the hour of the dawn to hear the Gospel in Moorfields, and Whitfield was moving multitudes assembled on the hillsides to a strange concern for their souls, men who felt the awe of God's Spirit descending on their consciences stood aloof and even disowned their sympathy. They sat at the tables of men who sneered and ridiculed, and they were silent. There is a time when it is a shame not to speak. But they knew that place and preferment would be denied them should the nickname Methodist be theirs. They knew that powerful faces would darken with resentment if they confessed their allegiance. They knew that wit would pierce them with its scorn, and pride pass them by in contempt. They forsook Christ and fled. To-day we are tempted in subtler ways to a like disloyalty. There are losses we will not suffer. There are prospects we will not sacrifice. There are friendships we will not relinquish. There are customs to which we make our bow. There are conventions we continue to observe, against which our consciences protest. There are loyalties and obediences we will not give. Could we see as God sees we would see Christ enshrined in the ideals of life and duty, in the causes of betterment and peace, and in the philanthropies of rescue and service which we neglect and desert, and find it written of us also, "Then all the disciples forsook Him and fled."

II

In the second place, *men forsake Christ through weariness.* These disciples were disloyal not only through fear, but their temptation assailed them in an hour of extreme weariness. They had walked as Passover pilgrims from Capernaum to Jerusalem. They were guests in strange homes, and that is always a straining experience. They had spent a week of unusual and exhausting excitement. Since they had entered Jerusalem with Jesus to the shouting of Hosanna they had lived out a full round of six long and eventful days. They had been stinted of rest and robbed of sleep. Even while they were witnesses of Christ's agony in the garden and listeners to his prayers they fell asleep in sheer weariness. It was when worn, spent, drained of energy both of mind and of body, that they forsook Him and fled.

There is no time when we are so easily seduced by things base and mean and disloyal to purity as when we are weary. When we are physically well, and the blood is coursing in strong and rhythmical flow in our veins, when life is like a flowing tide, and we have calm thoughts, happy courage, and a cheerful outlook in life, we are immune from many temptations. But when our strength is sapped, and the flame of life is burning low, and we are fagged in body, worn in nerve, strained in heart, temptation finds its hour and opportunity. This is clearly marked in the case of Jesus. "And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights He was afterward an hungered." Then the tempter came to Him. A man may walk in a steadfast sobriety until he passes through some valley of weakness and weariness, and there he falls. Many a man has lived

in a strong uprightness, but in some day of failing health he has practised strange dishonesties. A man in middle life often surprises us by his unexpected fall. He plays the coward to Christ as he would never have done in his buoyant and unclouded youth. An old man who has lived out a long round of years of noble service has sometimes closed his life in shame. He has been assailed in the weariness of old age and he has forsaken Christ.

There are greater wearinesses and more perilous even than those of the body and the mind. There are wearinesses of the spirit. We grow weary of the drudgery of life, of its routine and monotony and unceasing grind. Like the Israelites in the wilderness, even although a land of promise lures us on, we grow weary because of the way. We become disloyal to the great hopes and noble simplicities which once flushed our hearts, and crave for lower delights. We grow weary not only of the drudgery of life, but of its burdens, which seem to grow heavier year by year. We understand why David fled to Ziklag and made common cause with the enemies of his people and the foes of his faith. We can catch his tired sob through the cry, "I shall one day die by the hand of Saul." Then we are weary of the disappointments of life. Our hopes fade. Our promised harvest does not ripen. The things we had set our hearts on are never going to be ours. We find ourselves in instinctive sympathy with that question of John the Baptist as he cried from his prison, "Art thou He that should come, or do we look for another?" We grow weary also of the struggle with ourselves and our temptations. The strife seems so unavailing at times, and we are so often beaten and so often yield before the day is done. De Quincey has a chapter in his "Confessions of an Opium

Eater," which he calls "Unwinding the accursed chain." With set and stubborn resolve he set himself to master his craving for opium and its dreams. He reduced the quantity of the drug he took day by day. He seemed to be passing on to a triumphant self-control, but the accursed chain was longer and stronger than he had conceived. He grew weary of the struggle. After having reduced his draught to thirty drops he suddenly broke down, plunged madly into his vice, went back to his three hundred drops a day, and to physical ruin and moral despair.

We all understand these sad experiences. It was when we were weary, at the close of a long day, in our hour of failure, in the month when some great hope had been finally quenched, in the mood of discouragement and of despair, when the unexpected misfortune had overwhelmed us, as it overwhelmed the disciples in the garden, that we took that step, and did that deed, in which we forsook Christ and fled.

III

In the third place, *men forsake Christ through spiritual reaction.*

Behind their fear and their weariness there lay a deeper cause of failure. That was spiritual reaction. We sometimes forget how intense had been the life which these men had lived, and how dazzling had been the light in which they had rejoiced. Transforming and illumining as had been their years of fellowship with Jesus, these last days in Jerusalem had brought them into a religious wonderland. They had companied with the Lord Jesus, and beheld his glory. They had heard the great parables spoken in the Temple. They had sat at Martha's feast in Bethany and looked on Lazarus risen from the dead. On

the last day of the feast they had passed into the Holy of Holies. They had spent the early hours of the evening in the Upper Room, and at the supper table which Christian men and women consider their holiest memorial. They had listened to Jesus when He had unlocked his heart in counsel and in prophecy. All religious experiences are costly and exhausting. Every excitement exacts its toll of energy. The human spirit cannot sustain any rapture without times of relief. But the most exhausting of all emotion is an elating spiritual experience. It always has its after hours of dull and jaded mood. To have lived with Christ through this holy week must have set the spiritual fervour of these men of religious genius on fire. Then came the reaction of the night and the darkness, and the sudden peril of the garden, and then they forsook Him and fled.

This truth of the peril of spiritual reaction is detailed in every religious biography. When Moses comes down from the mountain top and his communing with God, the skin of his face shines with the glory of the Presence. But it is then, although he has the law of God in his hands and in his heart, that he breaks out once more in that hot and hasty anger which was his besetting sin. Elijah stands on Mount Carmel confronting in his solitary strength the prophets of Baal and braving the angry faces of Ahab and Jezebel. He wins his most notable victory, and stands confessed as the most commanding personality in Israel. But before the night is over he is fleeing to Horeb, a fearful and despairing man. An evangelist has often been so rapt in his message, and so elated by that supreme joy of seeing men pass from darkness to light, that he thought temptation could never again assail him. But

when the crowd has gone and he is alone in the silence, he comes to an hour when thoughts which ashame his face beset him. Sloth, pride, vanity, suspicion, doubt, fear, are his haunting devils. Every preacher knows how he must safeguard his Sabbath evening after a day of strenuous and happy service. He must set a watch upon his lips, carefully choose his company, spread his table meagrely and hold his thoughts in strict rein, lest in the hour of reaction he blot the fairness of the day. It is always after a great choice has been made, after we have passed under a new consecration, or laid upon ourselves a fresh vow, or sat in a charmed peace at the Communion Table, that we come to the hour of reaction, which is the hour of peril, and too often, to our own amazement and dismay, forsake Christ. This truth has been set in a poem whose words may seem too rich and lustrous for so austere and solemn a truth, but its keen, sure insight has penetrated to the depths of this sombre experience.

"A soul of many longings entered late
A chapel like a jewel blazing bright,
And fell upon the altar steps. All night
She held, with hopes and agonies, debate.
With tears the litanies love-passionate
Drenched her; triumphant colours burned her white;
And as the incense flamed in silver light
God sealed her to his own novitiate.

. . . . .

Nine paces from that House of Ecstasies
Her feet were taken in the snares of sin,
And, ere the morning quickened, she was dead."[1]

That is a picture of the peril of reaction. That is the vivid portrayal of the truth that men who have been in the upper room with Christ while the evening shadows are falling may forsake Him before the morning light has come.

[1] Rachel Annand Taylor, "The Vanity of Vows."

IV

There are two counsels which may safeguard us against our forsaking Christ, and with these I close. The first of these is to be found in that word with which Christ sought to safeguard his disciples against their hour of trial—the word "*Watch.*" We know how Jesus had foreseen this desertion. His foreknowledge of it cast a long shadow upon his spirit. "Ye shall leave me alone, and shall be scattered every one to his own." "They shall smite the shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered abroad." "Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat." Mark the patience and gentleness of Christ! Mark this surprising fact that He did not reproach them afterwards for their forsaking of Him! He knew how men are tempted through fear, by weariness, and in the hour of spiritual reaction. His word in the garden is his tender apology for man's frailty. "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Yet again and again He repeats his one counsel, "Watch," and the word is resounding through all the centuries. Watch with a sleepless vigilance, with loins girt and lamps burning, as men that wait for their Lord. Watch as men who must give an account. Watch as men who know how swift and sudden are the crises of the soul. Watch as men who, when they think they stand, must take heed lest they fall. Watch as men who have no confidence in the flesh. Watch in prayer, in wise restraint and noble temperance, in complete and humble dependence on God, and you shall pass through the darkest night and find the morning light shining on your faces unashamed.

The second counsel we shall take from one who was

loyal to Christ in a day when many were tempted to forsake Him. It is the counsel given as his message after the recital of the deeds of the cloud of witnesses who seldom faltered in their loyalty to God. That counsel is—"*Looking unto Jesus.*" Had the disciples turned away their eyes from the threatening faces and shining lances of the Roman guard, and sought Christ's face, they would have stood steadfastly by Him. I have never known a man, however tempted and tried, however weak and trembling, however burdened with weights and cares, and beset by his bosom sin, who looked away to Christ and did not find his fear and cowardice purged, and himself become a conqueror. We can pass safely through disease if by the healthy vigour of our blood we are immune from infection. The true way for a young heart to overcome its own hot and vivid temptations is to throb with a noble and inspiring purpose. "Walk in the spirit, and ye shall fulfil the lusts of the flesh." It is wiser to have one's ears filled with the music of Orpheus than to seal them against the singing of the Sirens. The only way for a man to keep himself unspotted from the world until his oldest years is to be loyal and eager in the service of Christ. Whatever will constantly lead us to lift our eyes to Christ, to look upon Him, in estimate, in reflection, in desire, and to look to Him in dependence and in appeal, will lead us unto the true way of an invincible loyalty to Christ. "Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in Heaven." Christ has no need to be ashamed of the disciple who has never been ashamed of Him.

V.—ENVY'S EVIL WORK

V.

ENVY'S EVIL WORK.

"For he knew that for envy they had delivered Him."—MATTHEW xxvi. 18.

THAT quiet, simple sentence in this condensed report of Christ's appearance before Pilate always arrests the mind. It is the statement by the evangelist of the inner judgment of Pilate. He had discerned the motives which lurked behind the air of justice on the part of the chief priests and elders. He knew the men with whom he had to deal. The sight of Christ, and the short interviews he had with Him, convinced him, not only of Christ's innocence, but of His spiritual majesty. But he was a man caught in the trap of his own past. Had his past been unstained, his action might have been different. He discerned the character of Christ. He was awed and touched by His greatness. "He knew that for envy they had delivered Him."

Now, at first sight, it seems an insufficient reason to give for the Crucifixion of Christ, that He was delivered out of envy. We have been accustomed to dwell on greater, and more significant causes. Every student of history can now see that the cross was inevitable, and that Christ's words, and deeds, and claims could not fail to bring Him into collision with the Jewish authorities, and with the world in which He lived. Every one knows that Christ longed for the cross, and viewed it as the goal and

consummation of His ministry. "He was straitened until His baptism was accomplished." We all know that the simplest and noblest expression of the Gospel is, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, by the death on the cross. It was God who ordained the cross of Jesus Christ. "The Lamb was slain before the foundation of the world." But of these great truths Pilate knew nothing. What he discerned was a truth that existed alongside of them. He saw that it was envy—eating like a cancer into the hearts of these men, breaking out at last in manifest corruption—which was the human motive in the Crucifixion of Christ. Other sins were leagued with it, but envy was the foremost and leading conspirator. It was envy that laid the first hand on Christ. The priests and elders envied Christ His reputation with the people. They envied Him His marvellous power and authority over the hearts of men. They envied Him His gracious words on which men hung; His deeds of mercy, that blessed when they were impotent; His mastery of the Scriptures, that had so often confounded them. They envied Him His separateness and elevation of life, His free and gracious holiness, which awed and touched all men's hearts, and cast them into fear. This envy drove them at length to crucify Him.

These priests and elders are dead and buried, and gone to their reward. We need not greatly trouble ourselves about them, except in so far as they are set to warn us, and to lead us into the truth and grace they despised. For we can all see that if envy once so warped the hearts of men that they crucified the Lord of Glory, it has been doing so throughout the centuries, and is doing so to-day. Let us look into this subject of envy on which so heavy

a burden is laid, and let us examine ourselves, lest we crucify the Lord afresh.

I.

Let us first enquire *what envy is.* Envy must be distinguished from other passions which are sometimes confounded with it. There is a wise and commendable emulation which is far from envy. The young heart which leaps up in eager desire to emulate a great deed, nourishes a noble and a sanctifying ambition. He has no envy of his hero. He will proclaim his praise when living, and keep his grave green when dead. The man who sees the high-souled act, or notes the piece of work done with a finish and completeness he has not attained, and longs that he too, may some day keep step with the doer of it, has no detracting envy in his heart. He is filled with that inspiring admiration, which is reverence.

Envy must also be distinguished from jealousy, although the one word in common speech is often interchanged for the other. Jealousy is the child of love—love that believes itself wronged, injured, robbed of its due. A man may be jealous of the woman he loves because he thinks she does not make due response to his love, and does not give him the love and faithfulness which belong to him. A child is jealous of his father's show of affection to a stranger. And God is called "a jealous God," because He loves His people, and will not have their hearts given over to other gods, and their lives to other services.

Envy is the child of hate. Envy does not long to run in the race and claim fellowship with those who excel. Envy does not seek the love and the well-being of the person envied. Envy is a gnawing hate, an inward grief, a wasting

impatience of spirit, the souring of the heart, the distemper of the soul, "a rottenness of the bones." Its work is to ruin, to undo, to blast the name and the fame of the man who is envied. If it be compelled to praise, it diminishes the honour by some mean "but," or by some subtle tone of detraction. Its moment of joy is when some mischance or misfortune has overtaken the man against whom it nourishes evil, when the clouds hang dark over his head, and success is turned into failure. While Christ was dying on His cross, these chief priests and scribes and elders passed by, and, looking up, they mocked Him, and cried, "He saved others, Himself He cannot save." The envy of their hearts was gleaming in their eyes. That was envy's triumph hour.

There is in the Chapel of the Arena, at Padua, a significant fresco, by Giotto, of "Envy." Giotto's representation is that of a man of mean, misshapen figure, with crouching shoulder, and craning neck. He stands in profile in the picture with lean cheek, sunken, averted eyes, one hand clutching a wallet of gold, the other stretched out with fingers shaped into claws. The ears are large, unshapely, distended. Out of the mouth there plays a serpent, whose fangs are striking Envy himself on the brow. Around the feet there leap up flames of fire. A master conception this of this passion of envy! Take one or two of the features. These large, distended ears are meant to signify that envy is on the alert for every babble of slander. The serpent in the mouth points to the poisonous insinuations, the fabricated stories which the tongue of envy is eager to tell. The hands, clawed like a vulture's, set forth the tearing motion and the clutching greed of the envious spirit; and the flames of fire round the feet mark the

torture and despair in which envy lives—a torture and despair which are of hell. When we look at Giotto's picture, and read the story of the trial before Pilate, we no longer wonder at the quiet sentence, "He knew that for envy they had delivered Him." We understand that envy is no excusable resentment, no trifling meanness of the spirit, no transient passion, but a deep-seated, over-mastering, indwelling spirit of evil, which reaches its final expression when it hales its victim to his cross.

But let us come to our own experience. Let me take an instance from the sphere with which I am most familiar—an instance which will make the matter clear to you. Every state is liable to envy. The artist who turns critic stabs his brother artist in the darkness of anonymity. The man of science decries his neighbour's gifts and achievements. The workman envies his fellow-workman's taste and skill. One woman envies another her grace and tact and charm, or even her dress and equipage. The ministry is not exempt from the temptation, and it is the fiercer because rumour's trumpet is ever giving it occasion. When a minister comes to a city, and his gifts, his learning, his zeal, and his piety meet with a due reward; when he stirs the souls of men until they cast out the secret iniquities of their hearts; when his ministry is found to be an inspiration and a solace, and his message to be a word from the Lord, and, as a consequence, his name is frequently on men's lips, and his aid is eagerly sought, then envy stands at the door. Then brother ministers are tempted, and sometimes fall before the temptation, to decry the success, to detract from the power, sometimes to injure the good name of the man in whose gift and grace they ought to rejoice, sometimes to recall the circumstances

of his birth, and to whisper the faults of his youth. Then the evil features of this arch-passion can be seen as Giotto saw them in his painter's vision, and as Pilate saw them, in clear revelation, on the faces of its priests and the elders. The same judgment can be passed on the men of mean, detracting spirit. "For envy they had delivered Him."

Envy is one in its nature, but manifold in its manifestations. Every man and woman has her or his own peculiar temptations to envy. It is a passion which possesses a gentle woman's heart as wholly as that of an ambitious and scheming man. I pray God that as I speak, His Holy Spirit may shine into your hearts, and reveal it to you if it lodge within. If any one be envious of a neighbour's wealth, or of his gift and scope and power, of his name and reputation, of his favour with persons of eminence, or of another's beauty and accomplishments, or—deadliest envy of all—of the purity and piety of another's life, let him pray God to see it unmasked, that he may see how hideous a thing it is. Let him beware of its dreadful consequences, and let him seek anew the forgiveness and cleansing of Him who lived and died, that we might no longer be under the dominion of this prolific sin.

II.

Let us now, in the second place, watch the *consequences of envy*. One of the most striking features of Giotto's fresco was that of the serpent coming out of the mouth, which was fastening its fangs upon the very forehead of the envious man. That set forth the truth that envy injures most the man in whose heart it is nursed. It must not be forgotten that, although the envious bear the

heaviest curse, envy is a chief minister of wrong in the world. Its course in history is marked by deeds of outstanding guiltiness. It was envy that murdered Abel; that sent Jacob into his father's presence acting a lie; that put Joseph in the pit and sold him as a slave; that vexed and plagued all the days of Moses, stirring up Aaron and Miriam, and inciting Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. It was envy that flung the javelin at David, and hunted him in the wilderness; that embittered the life of Elijah, and cast Daniel into the den of lions; that harassed Ezra and Nehemiah when they rebuilt Jerusalem. And if the page of secular history is glanced over, the record is still more striking. Envy is shown as the assiduous plotter of crime and revolution. But dreadful as are the deeds of envy, and amazing as are the records of sin and sorrow it has caused, the most terrible consequence is the wrong done to the man himself. Better be Joseph in the pit than his brethren in safety, with their demeaned spirit and haunted conscience. Better be David in the wilderness, with his psalms of confidence, than Saul on his throne, sunken in gloom. Better be Christ on the cross than the scribes and elders, with goading envy in their hearts.

Now what is it that envy does to the man possessed by it. Its simplest effect is to *blind the mind;* that is part of its confusion and evil work. Think how it blinded the minds of these priests and elders towards Jesus. Their words and deeds are a continual wonder to us. We can scarcely realise how they failed to be touched by His grace. They saw Him heal the blind, cleanse the lepers, and take up little children in His arms. They saw Him spent with service, worn with suffering, and haloed

with the grace that Gethsemane's night cast upon His face. They saw Him on the Cross, where even the malefactor was led to love and faith, and yet their minds were so blinded that this supreme vision of moral beauty did not dawn upon them. What is more remarkable than that? These men, learned in the law, and acquainted with every detail of worship, with prayer daily on their lips, saw no beauty that they should desire Him, because they were blinded by their envy. To this day, moral blindness is the penalty of envy. Not only the character and conduct of our fellow-men, not only the things that are true, and pure, and beautiful, and of good report, but the grace and loveliness of Jesus Christ Himself, remain undiscovered by the envious spirit. It has neither ears to hear nor eyes to see.

But envy does not only blind the mind. It also *poisons the heart.* As a poison strikes through the body and fevers the blood, so envy galls and fevers the heart. Here is a man who has gone down to his business with quiet, hopeful, purposeful spirit. But by the way he meets some one, who tells him some story in praise of his rival, recounts some success he has gained, or points out some stroke of wisdom or of genius by which he has gotten an advantage. What happens within that man? He is no poorer than before, not one whit less than he was. But a dart has gone to his heart, and a sullen scowl is in his face; bitter thoughts smoulder within him, and hot words come quickly to his tongue. His employees look on in wonder, his friends find him uncongenial, his home suffers in consequence of his distempered spirit—his child's prattle is quenched by some hasty, impatient word. He is poisoned by envy. Ah! I am at times driven to pity

these scribes and Pharisees when I think of the scalding grief, the vexing heat of temper, the gnawing passion in their hearts, when envy was their indwelling devil. To men who so nursed this deadly sin, the Gospel of the grace of God was preached in vain. Not the riot and turbulence of the malefactor, not the greed of the publican, not the fleshly lust of the harlot, war so effectually against the soul, and so resist the grace of God, as does this passion of envy. Jesus said unto the chief priest and elders: "Verily, I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the Kingdom of God before you."

The climax of evil consequence is reached when *envy crucifies Christ.* Do not think that Christ was crucified only at Calvary. He is being crucified to-day in every envious heart. What is it for you and me to crucify Christ? It is to stifle the beginning of conviction; it is to quench the first movings of repentance; it is to drive out every softening, chastening thought; it is to wilfully take the holy ideal which God's Spirit has brought in upon our imagination, and make light of it, and choose a lower, a more selfish way. It is to open the door of the heart to malice and slander and scorn, until gentle thoughts and impulses to goodness and hope in God are driven out. And that is the work of envy. The man of envious heart presents a barrier of triple brass to God's holy Spirit. Ah, brethren, a man may have no flagrant sin lying on his conscience, may not indulge in any riot of the flesh, and yet be lost, as the scribes and Pharisees were lost, because he has allowed envy so to master him that he has crucified the Son of God.

III.

But let us consider *the remedy for envy.* Envy may often visit the heart without reaching the climax of its consequence. There is no one who has not had a touch of envy at times. The man of saintly character and assured faith has found the subtle passion slipping into his heart, in some unwatchful moment, and troubling his peace. In one of the most thoughtful and uplifting of the Psalms this experience is detailed, and the sin and its remedy are disclosed. "My feet were almost gone, my steps had well-nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." And the psalmist tells us the doubts that troubled his mind, and the darkness that fell upon his spirit. But he recovered. "When I went into the sanctuary of God, then understood I their end." Standing in the sanctuary he was illumined, the vision of God was given him again; the baseness of the things he had envied was borne in upon him; the manner of his envious desire stood clearly forth, and in God's light he saw light clearly. "I was as a beast before thee," is the self-abasing confession. Brethren, when next envy has entered your heart, and clouded your spirit, and robbed you of the joy of the Lord, get you into some sanctuary. Find an hour of prayer, steep your mind in some holy meditation, come into the house of God, with penitent desire, seek the blessing of God's light, and then shall the vision of the eternal and the spiritual dawn upon you, then shall the grace and power of Him who emptied Himself, and made Himself of no reputation, take possession of you, and through this dark and vexing

experience you shall pass into clearer light and into deeper peace.

But envy is sometimes a more deeply-rooted evil. It is sometimes the evidence of a wholly unregenerate heart. If its felt power cast no burden on a man's spirit, if it be encouraged without check, it is a graver sign of a heart set against God than an open sin. Filthiness of the spirit is more deadly than filthiness of the flesh. Simon, the Pharisee, is further from God than the woman who was a sinner. Until we understand how nearly akin to the diabolic envy is, until we remember that it was the sin by which the angels fell and were transformed into devils, we shall not cease to wonder that Jesus seemed so indulgent to the frailties of the flesh, and so stern, so ruthless to envy. There is only one remedy for the envy of an unsurrendered heart: "Except ye be converted and become as little children," said Jesus to a band of men with envy chafing their spirits, "ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." If that be true of the green tree, how much more is it true of the dry? The man who is conscious that envy has been lodging within him, who knows of some name that stirs a hot fire in his bones, and brings bitter words to his tongue, should closely examine himself, and should anew cast himself humbly on the mercy of God. He should look with a new thought at the Cross of Christ, be filled with a deep shame for his share in it, and a true faith that so humbling himself and so believing, his sin has been forgiven and his foulness cleansed. He will know it by the sweet and kindly thought, the generous word, the gracious deed which shall be his, the soul weaned from vexing and blinding hate, the conscious indwelling of that Holy Spirit

whose fruit is love, joy, peace. Like Paul, whose envious heart was glutted when he stood and looked with a merciless hate at Stephen dying, he will come to the hour when he can write, as he wrote out of a Roman prison, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased and I know how to abound; everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." "If we are alive in the spirit let us also walk in the spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another."

VI.—BARABBAS

VI.

BARABBAS.

"And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas."
—MATTHEW xxvii. 16.

IT is a common experience in life to have some man or woman cross our path, remain but for the briefest space of time within our ken, and yet rouse in us an insatiable interest in them. We have travelled with them in some quickly passing journey, met them for a short hour at some friend's table, or merely seen them in some arresting attitude of grace, or of pride and temper, but the impression they made is ineffaceable. The deed they did was expressive of one of the elemental passions; the word they spoke was minted in the heart; the glance they gave revealed a hidden world within. We saw them only once, and never again. They were to us but as "ships that pass in the night and speak each other in passing," yet we have woven romances round their words, and set their faces in many a varying scene in the theatre of our imagination.

That mental attitude is common to us in regard to many names in the crowded world of the New Testament. We have all looked after the rich young ruler wistful about his fate. We have pondered over the sad heart of that master of hospitality, Simon the leper. We have had wondering thoughts about the goodman of the house. We cannot

resist speculation about the young man in the linen garment who fled out of the Garden of Gethsemane. And all of us have paused over the name Barabbas, and hungered to know what manner of man he was. Conjecture has been busy with his life, legend has fastened on his name, and romance has gilded his history and destiny. In our recent literature, a book of exceeding popularity has appeared, professing to expound Barabbas. But the volume is not only tawdry and melodramatic in its details, fustian in its style, and vulgar in its taste, but also deficient in any understanding of spiritual issues and verities, and, basest fault of all, intent upon being interesting at the cost of probability and of truth. But its large circulation bears witness to the intense interest in this man, who did no deed, and spoke no word in the Gospel story, who stood only for an instant in the light of Christ, whom the people chose instead of Jesus.

I.

We need not go, for our purpose, or for any purpose, beyond the New Testament for the history and character of Barabbas. His name is the *first* significant thing about him. He is Bar-abbas, "the son of the father," or master. His father was a teacher of the Jewish law, and an expounder of its precepts. He belonged to the religious aristocracy of the Jews. He had been trained in the traditions of Hebrew history, and had been taught that to be a member of the commonwealth of Israel was the proudest privilege a man could enjoy. His childhood and youth had been spent amid the influences of a home whose chief interests were the things of God, whose dominating

ambition was the steadfast advancement of His Kingdom. He was as nearly as possible in the position of a son of the manse. The child born within a minister's home is from his early years a witness of religious observances, is constantly brought into contact with religious motives and aims, is taught a scrupulous deference for the Lord's Day, a deep reverence for holy duties, a high regard for religious knowledge, a loyal attachment to a church and its history and privileges. When his nature is sound and unaffected by the warping twist of pride and worldly interest, or the blighting corruption of baser sins, he reaches manhood with a chivalrous devotion to the Church and the calling of his father. You must think of Barabbas in his youth, with his heart dilating at the story of the glorious past of the people of God, kindling with a passionate indignation at the thought of the subjection of Israel, and eager to share in any movement which will "restore again the kingdom to Israel."

The *second* significant thing which we are told about him is, that he had "made insurrection," or, as Luke more precisely puts it, "was cast into prison for a certain sedition made in the city." At the time of the entrance of Barabbas on his manhood, Jerusalem was seething with discontent. The whole nation was palpitating with hope, and lifting up its long shadowed face with expectation that the time of the Deliverer was at hand. "Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?" was John's message to Jesus; and when Jesus was found to be able to sway the multitudes with His words, and feed the hungry with bread, thousands flocked round Him, assured that the long-looked-for King had come. Hope deferred had made the heart sick, but the spirit of the unconquer-

able Hebrew could not be broken, and in the Holy City itself, and especially under the walls of the Temple, insurrection was continually being plotted, and sedition hatched. There was a fierce and defiant Home Rule party in Judæa, whose unresting aim was to drive the Roman garrison from the Holy Land. Their chosen name was that of Zealots, because of their unquenchable zeal for the restoration of the Jewish Dominion. Out of their ranks came one of Christ's disciples, Simon Zelotes, whom Jesus taught a wider truth and a better way than his fiery heart had at first conceived. These Zealots were the Invincibles in the Jewish struggle, and it was they who, at the siege of Jerusalem, fought with so desperate a fury that they appalled the veteran and disciplined soldiers of Rome. In their stubborn courage they fell in heaps, defending the breaches in the walls. It was this band of Zealots which was ever fostering sedition and making insurrection in the city. Among their number was found young Barabbas, the son of the Master in Israel, eager to roll away the reproach of his people, hating the Roman rule with an implacable hatred, willing to do and dare anything, if only a Jewish king shall reign again in Jerusalem. Many looked with hope on the eager young face of Barabbas Zelotes.

The *third* significant thing we are told of him is, that he was a robber, and had committed murder in the insurrection. Insurrection was a dangerous trade in any part of the Roman Empire. It was ruthlessly and remorselessly stamped out by the iron heel of Rome. The man who took part in it carried his life in his hand. He had to creep through the lanes of the city, or to play the bold part of outlaw. The wild and turbulent life he was com-

pelled to live told upon his character. The generous impulses, and the high aims with which the young patriot began, faded away; the crude and undevout religious feeling died within him. As the man was hunted by the Roman soldiery, he hardened and became cruel and brutal. As with outlaws in every country, robbery became a custom, and murder only an incident of life. So Barabbas suffered deterioration. To the last he was no common thief or cut-purse, but a man who had chosen to intrigue and plot, and to take the sword against the Government of Rome. But from the first he had hated Rome more than he had feared God; he had more of the proud ambition of the partizan than the lowly spirit of holy waiting for God, and, at length, his defiant and regardless deeds made him a mark for a keen-eyed and long-armed Government. He was cast into prison, whence he expected to come only to die the traitor's death on the cross.

The *fourth* and only other thing we are told, is that, both by the priests and the people, he was preferred to Jesus. It is not difficult to understand that choice. Here was a man who belonged to their city. Here was a man who had adventured his life for Jewish independence. Here was a man who had dared to raise revolt under the shadow of the Prætorium. And although his years had been given to robbery, and his hands were stained with blood, yet, in the moral blindness which had fallen upon the people, and amid the heat of passion which the priests had roused in them, he was just the man to be hailed as a popular hero. Compared with Jesus, crowned with thorns, with the marks of His scourging fresh upon Him, standing bound before them, meek, unresisting, silent, this brilliant, daring, fierce-souled young brigand is a captivating con-

trast in their heated imagination. The name that leaps to their lips, when Pilate offers to release a prisoner to them, is that of this darling outlaw. "Not this Man, but Barabbas." And Barabbas passed out, bewildered, elated, in the pride of an unexpected success. Jesus passed out to His cross.

II.

Now, as the Evangelists tell us the story of Barabbas, they focus our attention on one moment of his life. It is that dramatic moment in which Jesus and Barabbas pass out of Pilate's presence together, which is to them so full of pathetic suggestions. The first thought in their minds, as in the mind of every one who knows the story, is the *startling and amazing contrast of their fate.* A man of genius and skill, in our generation, George Tinworth, has worked out, in terra-cotta, the scene at this dramatic climax, with a discerning spiritual insight. From one door, passing before Pilate's judgment-seat, there issues Barabbas, smiling in exultation. The soldiers grasp him by the hand in rude congratulations. His friends seize him in transports of joy. The mob hails him with acclamation. By the other door, held by the hard grip of the callous soldiers, seeing no kindly face looking towards Him, confronted by the relentless hate of the infuriated multitude, there issues Jesus. In all the crowd there is only one discerning, pitying heart. The artist has placed, not very far from Christ's door, a woman with a little child in her arms, and she turns on Jesus as He passes her wondering and compassionate eyes. The woman with the child, alone of all the throng, sees

whose is the victory and the unfading glory. That is a master touch. To this day men walk our streets, and sit in our high places, with the triumphant pride of Barabbas, and neither they themselves nor others know how completely they have failed. We seldom see with the eyes of the understanding, where true failure and true success lie. The man who has run the gauntlet of impure indulgence, escaping its open and shameful penalties, but suffering the desecration of his spirit; the man who has stooped to crafty tricks and unscrupulous devices, has filled his purse with ill-gotten gain, and now swells in contemptuous pride, little understanding that he has emptied his heart of all reverence; the man who has curried favour with the populace, and caught their applause at the cost of all the high and holy ideals of his youth—these may seem to have achieved success in life. Others who have dared to be poor without a moment of querulous complaint, who have scorned to be false to a single conviction, who have refused to touch the muck which others walk in, who have suffered for an incorruptible honesty and a sensitive honour—these may seem to have failed. While Jesus was hanging on His cross, hearing the derision which cried, "He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now," Barabbas was meeting his boon companions in social glee, and was the hero of the hour in blinded and fanatic Jerusalem. In such startling and amazing contrasts it is difficult to keep one's eyes clear, so as to see the true failure and the true success. How many of us so see it, and so understand it, and so accept it, that we would rather walk, thorn-crowned, with Christ to the cross, than pass scatheless to the shameful glory of Barabbas? How many of us see that it is better to

suffer the penalty of our sin, better to be checked in our course of open retribution—aye, better to walk burdened by the sins of others, than to escape the due rewards of our deeds, and because we have kept step with the mob, and caught their gross and carnal imagination, win the rewards of a base success. Ah, young men and women, when your eyes are like to be glamoured by the place and fame which the world gives its own, and you are tempted to any base and dishonourable way, look on the face of Jesus as He passes out to His cross. And you, who in later years, mourn the sad perplexing contrasts in life, and sometimes almost lose heart when you see smiling and defiant sin passing wronged and scorned purity with contempt, call up the face of Jesus, and walk behind Him in His way of sorrow. "Verily I say unto you; ye have your reward."

The second thought which attracts us is—*how much Barabbas missed.* We cannot help thinking of what might have been in the case of Barabbas. As we recall his radiant youth, his eager patriotism, his daring courage, his chivalrous devotion to Israel, we feel the soul of goodness that throbbed behind this man's life, his ardent abandonment to what he conceived to be the Kingdom of God. This man, we see, might have been, and ought to have been, a disciple of Jesus. The very thing he so dimly and darkly saw, the thing he so fondly desired—the revival of the ancient glory of Israel—was being fulfilled by Jesus. There was one of his own company who had cast away his crude thoughts and violent methods, and entered the ranks of the apostolic band, and that chosen company had better included the name of Barabbas Zelotes than of Judas Iscariot. But here is the pathos of it all. He

was so near Jesus. He heard his name linked with the name of Jesus. He knew himself to be preferred to Jesus. He must have wondered at that strange fate which released him, and sent Jesus to His cross. And yet he did not turn to look at Jesus. He did not look, but passed out, not knowing that He who could have fulfilled his young dreams, satisfied his eager heart, employed his splendid and resourceful energy, and set him with the princes of Israel, almost touched his hand. Is there a sadder thought about any other of those who stand in Christ's light than this, of how much Barabbas missed by not even looking at Jesus? For it is not difficult to conceive that he might have been brought face to face with Jesus. There was one who lay bound with him in the prison, who did not make his lucky escape, but was brought forth to die with Jesus. The penitent malefactor was compelled to look at Jesus, and he saw the King of Israel, and entered the Kingdom of God. There might have been another malefactor, who, following Jesus in the way, would have looked up at Him on His cross, and seeing also his Lord, would have begun to live in the Paradise of God.

Are there not many to-day to whom the name of Jesus is familiar, and even graciously significant, who daily pass near to Him, and even touch Him, and yet never look at Him? The world is full of men and women who are engrossed in literature, absorbed by art, fascinated by music, or are immersed in business, or have set their eyes steadfastly on some ambitious career, or have a passion for some pre-occupying pursuit—so that they never really look at Jesus. There are some of you who are ardently patriotic, who spend hours over the traditions of your native land,

and are eager for its honour—as eager as Barabbas was for his—and yet you never really consider Jesus. Are there not some of you who feel yourselves drawn by high ideals, who are full of chivalries on behalf of the sick and the poor, and the disadvantaged, and yet you do little more than glance at Jesus? You hear Him spoken of; you know His claims; you pass Him—nearer than Barabbas—in your work, in your decisions, in your religious customs, but you do not look at Him. Many men must first be lifted upon a cross before they will really look long enough at Jesus to understand Him. Look at Him whose sanctity and loveliness are the greatest glory of the past; from whom there breathes a fragrance that has sweetened the air of the world, and made it more healthful for man—the very breath of God abiding upon it. Look at Him who has enlarged the knowledge, widened the thoughts, and purified the hearts of all who have put their trust in Him; at One who lived for truth, who died for men, who rose again to be their Redeemer, and Guide, and constant Friend; at One whose Kingdom shall widen with the ages, strengthen with the knowledge of truth, outlast all empire, the glory and the hope of our poor humanity; at One who can do that one thing of desire—without which no soul can rest satisfied—deliver you from your sin, and fulfil every holy aspiration; at One who knows, and lives, and waits for that look at Him, through which He shall shoot new life and hope into your soul. Who among you—bright, hopeful, strong, eager, ambitious of goodness and of nobleness—will miss it all by not looking at Jesus?

One other thought is plainly in the minds of the Evangelists. It is the *madness and folly of the choice of*

the multitude. We can detect a note of pity for this befooled and blinded multitude, who chose a robber and murderer in preference to Jesus. We share this mingled amazement and sorrow. These Evangelists have caught something of the prayerful compassion of Jesus for those who did not know the time of their visitation. This multitude did not know whom they were rejecting, and did not know that they were closing the book of their history, fixing their eternal destiny, and quenching with their own breath their one hope of temporal peace and spiritual greatness, when they cried: "Not this Man, but Barabbas!" But the crowd of condemning faces on which Jesus looks is larger than that which pronounced His doom in Jerusalem. I say it as a simple verity, that He does see many of our faces and hear our cry against Him. In this hour, when Jesus and His cross, His grace and His service and His fellowship are offered to you, and you turn away to some lower life, some unholy choice, some self-pleasing indulgence—this very hour when Jesus in His meekness and lowliness is passing by you, and you turn away and choose some gleaming worldly good, there may be no word, even of disdain or impatience, on your lips, no hoarse cry of rejection in men's ears, but the angels hear the echo of the shout that filled the Court of Pilate: "Not this Man, but Barabbas!" With you it sounds: "Not this Man, but my pride, my ease, my worldly success, my sin!" And wise and patient spirits, who love and long after you, do wonder at the folly and madness of your choice. Past all cost and consequence, in the power of that Holy Spirit, who has been setting Christ and His glory before you, choose now and for ever. . . . Lord Jesus,who hast loved me with an everlasting love, who didst set up Thy Kingdom

of truth and service that I might enter in, who didst die for my sin and for desire of me, I accept Thee, now, ever, only, as my Lord; I follow Thee in the way of Thy Cross, and I commit my soul and my life to Thee. Speak one word to me, O Lord, even Thy word of peace.

VII.—PILATE'S WIFE

VII.

PILATE'S WIFE.

"When he was sat down in the judgment-seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just Man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him."—MATTHEW xxvii. 19.

EVERY religion may be tested, ethically and practically, by its appeal to womanhood. That faith which out-classes every other in its power to meet the needs of woman, and uplift her to moral beauty, will stand every other test of the truth of God. One has only to think of the audience-chamber of a Greek courtesan, thronged with men paying court to an open and unashamed profligacy, or of a zenana, with its stifling seclusion and petty interests, or of a harem, with its atmosphere of intrigue and envy, and then to enter a Christian home, and see a Christian woman moving about it in the ineffable grace of her purity and dignity, to realise how perfect the test is. As much as the women of Israel out-distanced the women of Greece, and that is as much as heaven out-distances earth, so much did Judaism out-distance Hellenism. For woman, even when darkened by ignorance and superstition, because of her supremely great office, because of the crushing weight of the penalties for sin which fall upon her, because of her susceptibility to the chaster and holier virtues and, above all, because of her instinct for love and devotion, is keenly alive to a sublime moral faith, and responds quickly

and passionately to the appeal of a religion of holiness. And, therefore, when Christ came with His meekness and lowliness, His searching and uncompromising hostility to sin, His compassion for weakness, and His great cross of love and atonement, womanhood fell down at His feet in a surpassing loyalty, and Christ placed a crown on her head. It was a man of Macedonia whom Paul saw in his vision, but it was a women who listened by the river-side, and first made response to Christ. And to this day the voice of Christ finds its clear echo in women's hearts, and both gentle and simple are found reaching their noblest and highest when sitting at His feet.

It is then precisely what would have been expected, that amid the sad scenes of the tragedy of Christ's last day on earth, there should be told us this idyll of Pilate's wife. The story shines on the page like a strong gleam of sunshine on a winter day. It is a word of radiant prophecy in the record of a history laden with sorrow. Matthew tells us very little about her, for it is her *act* he fixes our thoughts upon. We know that she is the only Roman woman in the Gospels, and that she is the only woman of the highest rank whose heart was touched by Jesus. We know that she was Pilate's wife, and lived with him in wifely dutifulness, and faithfully loved him. We know her to have been a woman of noble temper, of refined and sensitive spirit, full of spiritual longings, with a compassion that slipped into her dreams. And we know that she knew Jesus—knew Him well enough to pass a penetrating judgment upon Him ; and finally, that she came to a costly moral decision about Him, and in a fine act of self-forgetting courage carried it out.

As I recall the world to which she belonged; as I remember the man to whom she was linked in life; as I realise his character, and then think on the part she played, my imagination sees again this woman's face, wearing its saintly grace, thy sympathy is profoundly stirred, and I wish to entwine a wreath of that laurel of Christian love and praise, that as I wreath it round her brow, you may realise what Christ did for her, and may do for you.

I.

The first thing I remark about Pilate's wife was the *sorrow and shame of her life.* There is no doubt but that a tender love subsisted between Pilate and his wife. This cruel and worldly man had this redeeming virtue left him, as such men sometimes have. The altar flame of love had not gone out. The proof of this mutual love lies in the fact that she accompanied him to Jerusalem. A Roman governor was forbidden by law to take his wife with him to his province, very much for the same reason as a ship captain is forbidden to take his wife to sea. That law could be broken only by a strong personal appeal. But in that imperial age, hastening with swift strides to an unspeakable corruption, husbands were only too willing to be freed from a wife's watchful eyes, and wives were as willing to be left to live their butterfly lives amid the gaieties of a profligate Roman world. But Pilate's wife was more than eager to face the loneliness of a life among an alien people. Love broke even a stern Roman law. But how far apart had these two drifted—although their love still persisted. The young Pilate whom the woman had idealised, whose face had flitted through the dreams of her youth, whose

career she had so hopefully anticipated, had deteriorated into this sordid, cruel, vengeful, murderous man. What a sorrow is it for a woman to have a noble faith in spiritual verities, to have holy reverences singing their silent hymns in her soul, to feel a higher idea of duty and of life drawing her on, and yet be linked in the most sacred mystery of life to one who is contemptuous of it all! What a heavy heart has that woman who must screen her children's eyes from their father's habits, keep their ears from the record of his deeds, teach them a truth he does not know, fold their hands in the prayer at which he would scoff! What a despairing shadow falls upon her spirit as she marks the degradation of his character, and discerns his cunning cowardice and his cruel, unscrupulous ambition! That was the sorrow and shame of Pilate's wife. What an agony she suffered as she saw him quailing in cowardly fear, yielding to that hoarse cry of "Barabbas!" and willing to cast innocence, gentleness, holiness, to the hounds of hell, if only he might keep his seat! The women of Jerusalem who saw Pilate's wife looking out from her lattice, and caught the flash of the gems on her white hands, and marked the pride of her patrician face, and envied her ease and state, never guessed how wistfully she looked upon them, and how constant was this cloud of sorrow and of shame, because she knew herself to be the wife of a dishonourable man.

Ah! that is the heaviest cross a woman of noble temper and of spiritual vision can carry. The woman for whom your tenderest thoughts and most entreating prayers are needed is not that poor drudge whose life has been beaten down by toil, who spends her years in a bitter poverty; not the widow whose bereaved years have that pathetic

companionship of holy memories of days gone by; not even the woman whose trust has been betrayed; not the loving heart which has missed the prize of life. These wear a sanctifying sorrow, which has not a moment of shame. It is the woman who lives with a man she can no longer respect, who eats the bread and wears the raiment his unworthy methods have gained, who suffers a pain, which he hardly discerns, from his coarse habits and ungodly ways, who, year by year, as she looks into him, sees him becoming more unprincipled and more unscrupulous. And if she love him still—for all the waters of sorrow and of shame cannot quench love—if she remember her days of perfect faith in him and high hope for him, then she bears a wound for which there is no balm. "A sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things." She may never complain; she may wear a mask of lightness on her face, through which only close watching eyes can see the aching care, yet she walks through life with a shamed and tortured heart. Blessed is she who so takes up her cross, and denies herself, and follows Christ. "Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing."

II.

The second thing I remark about Pilate's wife is *her service to her husband.* "When he was set down on the judgment-seat, his wife sent unto him, saying: Have thou nothing to do with that just man?" It was a deed of singular daring. It was the last resource of a loving heart making one more appeal. To send a message, with the attempt to sway the mind of the judge while he sat upon the seat of judgment, was a punishable offence,

and only the awfulness of the deed she saw about to be done could have moved her to it. Pilate may have smiled at her dream, but her words stung his conscience, and had there been any way of escape for this hardly-pressed man, had he had courage to brave his fate, gladly would he have set Christ at liberty, and gone home to look with the eyes of a man, redeemed from his evil fate, in the face of her whose love had almost saved him.

That is the highest service a wife can do for her husband —to stand in the shadow while he faces public light; to be ever his counsellor, his helper, his gentle and yet unfaltering preacher of righteousness—aye, to be his saviour—is her noblest office. There is no relationship so close as that for which a man leaves his father and mother, no intimacy so fateful, and no influence so strong. I do not wonder that on the day when a man and woman are wed there is an under-current of tears, so solemn, so eventful is the step. When we take up the Scriptures, and read their inspired record, we see how mighty is the influence of a wife upon her husband. When a man's wife conspires with him against his soul, as Jezebel did with Ahab, as Herodias did with Herod, as Sapphira did with Ananias, there is no possible issue but death. When a woman makes the home a sanctuary with Hannah, or dares for God like Esther, or walks in a holy, blameless life like Elizabeth, not only shall their husbands wear a crown of peace, but kingdoms shall be saved, and prophets shall be born. And in this common, work-a-day world of ours, from which, to some men's eyes, the glory is faded, I still see noble women doing this supreme and sometimes costly service; not only breathing in the home an atmosphere of purity; not only striving to keep their husbands' feet from

falling in a difficult path; not only helping by that subtle sympathy which sends a message without words, but in his moral crisis, in his hour of bewildering temptation, laying hold upon his heart, and pleading for righteousness and Christ.

In the Doge's Palace at Venice there is a fresco so large that it occupies the whole end wall of the lofty Council Hall. It is a triple picture of heaven and purgatory and hell. The *ciceroni* point out what seems to them a strange and perplexing circumstance. The painter has set his wife in each of the three sections of the picture. He has put her in the forefront in every case, conspicuous in her robe of blue. The same lovely face looks out from heaven, with saintly purity shining in her eyes; from purgatory, with a coarse and sensual gleam; and from hell, with the horror of an unrepentant agony. What is the meaning of the anomaly? You can answer the question when you read the painter's life. At times his wife was his good angel, to lead him in the way Godward and heavenward; at times she became merely earth's coarse and common clay; and again she became his temptress to deeds of shame. Pilate never held the painter's brush in his hand. He never chose a wall on which to fresco the visions of his imagination. But, like every other man, he painted within the chamber of his soul. And when in the dark days to come he wept beside her bier, and carved the inverted torch over her tomb, and the vision of the world to come came upon him—then, bright with radiance, with the shining cross on her brow, in the heaven of the blessed, walking the fields of Asphodel in her robes of white—*there, and nowhere else*, he placed this woman, God's best earthly gift to him, whose chaste conversation, coupled with fear, had almost won him to Christ.

III.

The third thing I remark about Pilate's wife is *her intercession for Christ.* How she came to know Christ we cannot tell. Tradition assures us that she was a proselyte, and, like so many Roman women, sick of the welter of sin in their licentious world, she had become a Jewess in belief. This is extremely unlikely, else Pilate had not so intensely hated and ruthlessly persecuted the Jews. It has been conjectured that some of her maids had told her of the Prophet of Nazareth; or that, as she looked out of her window, she saw Him pass, and one look had done much between two sympathetic spirits. But the knowledge of Christ is plainly deeper and more assured than any of these sources would warrant. It is more likely that in the exercise of the charities of a compassionate heart, she had heard from the sick and poor of the wonderful compassion of Christ; that her eager spirit had enquired after His words and His message; and then in her dream God's Holy Spirit had given her that special revelation, which disclosed so much of the beauty of Christ, and bore in upon her the hideous wrong that was being done. It was from that dream, and the suffering it caused her sensitive spirit, that she arose to give her penetrating judgment and exercise her unique act of intercession for Christ.

And so to this day Pilate's wife walks at the head of all that long procession of nobly-born, and nobly-placed, and nobly-gifted women who do service for Christ. She leads the noble army of saintly martyrs and confessors. There follow in her train queens like Helena and St Elizabeth of Hungary, women of generous hand like Lady Huntingdon, and of saintly wisdom like Lady

Glenorchy; and those even greater and more devoted women, enshrined in the "Book of Martyrs" and the "Scots' Worthies," true Ladies of the Covenant, who, when Christ, in His persecuted saints, walked again the way of weeping, cast aside their pride, placed no value on their rank, reckoned light the suffering, and stepped into the way with Him. Surely we shall not say too much when we believe that the name of Pilate's wife, though not written on this page, is written first on the roll of those women who laboured much in His Gospel, "whose names are in the Book of Life."

I pray God to send such women to us now. Christ has a place and a service for the humble and lowly born. He makes them His chosen intimates. He calls them to sit at His feet. He accepts their simple charities. He rejoices in their spikenard. But there are services which only the rich and the noble and the gifted can render, and these also are needed. If God has given you rank, if He has endowed you with wealth, if He has bestowed upon you beauty and charm, if He has filled your lives with leisure, if He has placed you in a position of influence, if He has given you the gifts of apt speech, or strong wisdom, or of song, depend upon it He will pass by your home, He will rouse you from your sleep, He will pass into your dreams as He walks His *via dolorosa*, and the call will come to you for some such service as you can give. Will you not leave your selfish round of so-called duties, which are the wearying occupations of society, your struggle for place and recognition, which leave only a sick heart behind, your idle gaieties, your indulgent sloth, and look out and see Christ's face in His poor, in His lost, in His castaway, in His down-trodden and oppressed—and give that service to

them which is service to Him? "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

IV.

The fourth thing I remark about Pilate's wife, is her *imperfect knowledge of Christ.* Her act was one of singular daring, and yet how little she knew of Christ. Her testimony to Him is simply "that just Man." That phrase meant much in a Roman woman's mouth. She knew Him to be innocent of the charges made against Him. She knew Him to wear a moral loveliness which had ensnared her heart. She saw Him stand out in striking contrast to Pharisee and Sadducee, like a shining star in darkest night, and she threw her testimony into the phrase which was the highest a Roman could give, and the strongest a judge can feel. "That just Man," she said, and yet, no doubt, much more could have been said by her of the spiritual grace of Jesus. But how much must have been hidden from her. She had seen Him pass in the street as He went up to the Temple. She had heard His sayings and pondered their grace. She had been touched by His deeds. The Spirit of God had shown her many of "the things of Christ." But had she sat with Mary at His feet in Bethany, had she seen Him stooping in His condescension to wash His disciples' feet, had she sat down at the supper table and heard Him speak of heaven, and peace, and joy—aye! had she seen Him as He was seen on His cross, this woman would not only have sent her message, but would have broken every propriety, confronted His accusers in the place of judgment, followed Him to His cross, and stood with His mother and the

other Mary beholding her Lord and her God. O women of Jerusalem! there was one among you, who, out of her imperfect knowledge, did more than you all. Her shoe-latchet you are not worthy to unloose.

But what a mighty appeal comes to you, ye women of this day of greater grace! Match yourselves against this woman of the noble deed. Test your knowledge, your faith, your love, your life by hers. Christ is more to you than ever He was to Pilate's wife. "That just man," is a meagre word for knowledge such as yours He walks before you in the pages of this Holy Word. His words sound in your ears, His deeds shine in their beauty. His cross stands, with all its significance of love and all its power to reveal, and to atone for sin and to quench its power, and yet do you dare as much for Him as she did? Is there any one here of unsatisfied heart, of undedicated gifts, of unsanctified life, spending her life in a round of pleasure, leaving Christ to walk His way alone, deeming His service too arduous and too exacting for a fastidious and delicately-nurtured woman? Ah! leave your lower life, count not the cost of breaking with those who live in an unspiritual atmosphere, accept Him as Lord who loved you and died for you, and pass out into the way of service, and your deeds shall shine in the completed Gospel story with the intercession of Pilate's wife.

VIII.—WHAT SHALL I DO WITH JESUS?

VIII.

WHAT SHALL I DO WITH JESUS?

"Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?"—MATTHEW xxvii. 22.

NOWHERE will you find so dramatic and so decisive an instance of the irony of fate as in Pilate's dealing with Christ. By the irony of fate is meant the march of events to an issue the very opposite of which the policy and cunning of men have intended, and that irony of fate is the moving of the finger of God. Pilate claimed to be the autocratic ruler of the Jewish City. "Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee and have power to release thee?" was his haughty speech to Christ. Yet he was compelled to do what he stubbornly resisted by men he flouted and mocked. Pilate knew Christ to be innocent. "I find in Him no fault at all," he publicly protested. Yet he scourged Christ as if He had been a common malefactor and delivered Him to his doom. Pilate believed himself to be guiltless of the death of Christ. He washed his hands in water as a histrionic display of his neutrality. Yet it is the judgment of history that Pilate's hand nailed Christ to his cross. He believed himself to be the master of his soul. To-day men see with a certain contemptuous pity that he did not dare to call his conscience his own. It is the climax of this irony of fate that Pilate, who did not mean to entangle himself

in Christ's trial, and intended to commit himself neither for nor against Christ, found that Christ was inescapable. The situation is disclosed to us in this impatient cry, "What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?" In spite of his strenuous and skilful efforts to avoid his duty and to devolve his responsibility, Pilate found himself face to face with the inevitable Christ.

Now we must not isolate this man and his crime and his fate. We must not think that, because this spiritual tragedy was played out to its close on the high stage of history and before the face of Christ, it is unlike the spiritual tragedies of other men. I believe that in Pilate dealing with Jesus we have the most common type of a fruitless religious experience. Few men betray Christ in cool blood as Judas did. Few die reviling Him with the oaths of the impenitent thief. Fewer still, nowadays at least, plot and scheme against Him with the undisguised hate of the Sadducees. But every day men refuse to face Christ's claims, and decline to commit themselves to the acceptance or rejection of them. They turn their backs upon Him, while they think they are leaving unsettled the question put by Pilate, "What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?"

Pilate's question breaks up into three points. First, the inevitable Christ; second, the inevitable alternative; and third, the inevitable decision.

In the first place, *the inevitable Christ.* When Pilate first saw Jesus and marked the meek and unresisting captive, clothed in the white robe of the Passover feast, he thought he could rid himself of this unworldly dreamer with a wave of his hand. But this cool, unscrupulous, able man found that Christ could not be so easily dismissed.

The tide of events which he could not control brought Christ back again and again to his judgment seat. He tried to commit Christ's case to the Jewish Sanhedrin, but they flung Him stubbornly back again. He had the happy thought of sending Him to Herod because Christ was a Galilean. Herod played with Him for an hour, and sent Him back again under escort to Pilate. He endeavoured by scourging Him to glut the anger and awaken the pity of his accusers, that in their softened mood he might release Him. He found that he had only whetted their fury for his death. He threw his last card when he tried to release Him instead of Barabbas. He raised a cry which was like the bay of hounds who had tasted blood. Pilate found himself face to face with the inevitable Christ.

Now Christ is as inevitable to you and to me, and to all men eventually, as He was to Pilate. The heathen who have never heard his name, who have only the Christian character dormant and unconscious in their hearts, do not yet stand face to face with Jesus. But let Christ's name once be named, let the radiant holiness of his life, the heavenly beauty of his character, the divine majesty of his person, be disclosed, and in that hour every man is compelled to ask, "What shall I do then with Jesus?" Men may attempt to dismiss Him. They may pretend to be calmly and philosophically neutral to Him. They may hear his claims with the bitter self-mockery and sad wonder which Pilate felt. This remains, that Christ is some one with whom something must be done. The secularist may blot out the whole spiritual world with a clever jibe. God and his love, sin and judgment, heaven with its pure delight, and hell with its intolerable pain, may be coarsely ridiculed. Still, he has to do with Jesus.

The agnostic may tell us that he cannot determine what is true, and that the mysteries of religion are so great that he must humbly say, "I do not know, and I sit like a little child, observant of and bewildered by the wonders of earth beneath and heaven above." Still, he has to do with Jesus. The critic, fresh from his study of the sources and origins and structure of the Gospels, may say that he cannot determine how many words Jesus spoke, or what John knew of his grace and truth, or whether Christ rose again from the dead, and he must therefore stand outside the fold of the faith. Still, he has to do with Jesus. Christ is a fact. The pattern of his life is a revelation, to which the conscience gives the warrant of its imperious sanction. Christ's claims are as simple and clear as a commandment. The truth as it is in Jesus demands an answer. The secularist and the agnostic and the critic are all face to face with the inevitable Christ.

What is true of these scholars is true of all other men. No man can ignore Christ. A man may never enter into a house of prayer. He may never open a Bible. He may never kneel in entreaty and confession. He may sneer with scornful humour at the unquestioning simplicities of a child's hymn. He may wilfully turn his back on all that is pure and holy, and he may abjure Christ's name. Still, he has to do with Jesus. Let him go down to his business and forget, if he can, that Christ ever lived or died. Let him plunge into the hot strife of an eager life which is absorbed in the pursuit of gain. In the midst of it all a presence stands by his side and a voice touches his conscience to the quick: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Let him open his ledger and set down an unjust

entry. With the lie upon the page before him Christ will look into his face, and his low, soft voice utter his condemnation, "Out of the heart proceed—thefts." Let him go to his pleasures and indulge in vicious and costly delights in some haunt of self-indulgence. He may think that the riot of the senses and the clamour of the cries without and within have drowned every other voice. In some quiet moment, in the midst of the Babel of his sins, or as he walks homeward in the silence, Christ will meet him, and this sentence from Christ's lips will fall upon his ears, "There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known." There are some sins that a man can do only in the dark. The light that must be put out is the light of Christ. But it is when a man thinks he has quenched that light that it flames up anew, and his sin and the shame of it stand revealed. For the man who has once heard of Christ, upon whose ears his words have once fallen, to whom even a faint vision of his moral and spiritual grace has been given, finds Christ inevitable.

There is a familiar legend which has often been cited because it sets this truth in a clear light. The story has come down from the early centuries that when the storm of persecution broke over the Christian Church in Rome, the little company of the believers besought Peter to seek refuge in flight. His sense, both of loyalty and of honour, rose up to protest. But his friends pleaded that while their deaths would be only the loss of a few sheep of the fold, his would be the loss of the shepherd. He set out by night along the Appian way. But as he travelled a vision flashed upon him of a figure clothed in white and a face crowned with thorns. "Quo vadis, domine?" "Whither goest

thou, Lord?" Peter cried to Christ. "To Rome, to be crucified instead of thee."

> "Into the night the vision ebbed like breath,
> And Peter turned and rushed on Rome and death."

That is a parable of the inevitable Christ. Whether we seek Him or seek Him not, whether we are in the way of our duty or out of it, the word of Christ, the temper of Christ, the spirit of Christ, the vision of Christ, all that Christ is, shall meet us face to face. Each man comes to the hour when he shall cry, "What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?"

Secondly, *the inevitable alternative.* Pilate realised, with an unconcealed anger, that Christ was inevitable. But he did not think himself shut up to one of two alternatives. He thought that there was a third way. He thought he could stand aside. "Take ye Him and crucify Him," was his method of escaping his dilemma. Whether he was a king or not, whether he was the man of sublime moral beauty whom humble folk adored, or the raiser of sedition, as the Jewish leaders declared, he did not wish to decide. But he found himself face to face with an inevitable alternative. He had either to accept Christ or to reject Him.

Now why is it that with Pilate, and with every other man, Christ presents only one of two alternatives? For two reasons. The first is that Jesus Christ always presents himself to the soul in the form and fashion of a truth. With a truth there are only two possible courses, assent or denial. Jesus never comes to any human soul with a claim higher than the soul can recognise and accept. To Nicodemus, scribe, rabbi, a master of Israel, He had one message. To the woman by the well, poor, reprobate,

outcast, He has another. To the disciples by the lake shore cleansing their nets He has one call. To the disciples gathered together in the upper room after days and nights of teaching and fellowship He speaks with a different voice. What He asks is that every man be true and loyal to the truth as he sees it. And therefore to the claim and appeal of Christ which rings in your consciences there is only one of two alternatives. You must either accept it or reject it. Pilate thought he could leave open the question of whether Christ was a simple mystic or a dangerous rebel. He could not. That was his inevitable alternative.

The second reason why Christ presents an inevitable alternative is that Christ does not ask merely intellectual assent. He demands action. Oh, Pilate was supremely right. Christ is some one with whom you must *do* something. A mere assent or a mere consent of the mind, or a mere word of confession, means little or nothing to Christ. What He waits for is action—what you will do. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be baptised." "Leave all that thou hast, rise up, and follow Me." "Sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and come and follow Me." "Except a man deny himself and take up his cross daily, he cannot be my disciple." It was a noble proof of the depth and reality of Paul's faith that he cried, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" The wide range of Christ's words, the transcendent glory of his revelation of God, the awful and tremendous claims of Christ to be Lord of all, may trouble and bewilder you. But to the call and appeal of Jesus, which is called Christ, to acknowledge the sovereignty of his character, to be true to the pattern of his life, to enter into his spirit and temper, and to follow Him,

there is only one of two answers. In this hour you are either accepting or rejecting. "He that is not with Me is against Me."

I am moved to strange thoughts about the struggle of Pilate, and of all other men with this inevitable alternative. I am impressed by the pathos and the pain of its hours, and the frequent sadness of its issue. Pilate has been dead all these years, and yet I feel a deep pity for him as I think of his pathetic situation on this fateful day. How strong and how tender were the promptings he had to be true to Christ! His office as a judge clothed him with a certain impartiality. His Roman instinct for law and justice urged him to an honest and fearless judgment. His honour shrank from complicity with what he felt to be a base wrong to a defenceless victim. His wife (and nothing more surely indicates the possible nobility of Pilate's character than her belief that he could be a man of truth) set all these motives in flood. His conscience also, not yet dead within him, was roused to protest. And Christ, with his patient majesty and his reproachful looks and wistful words, appealed to that reverence for moral loveliness which never dies out of the worst of men. How nearly was he loosed from his bonds! There was a moment when the tide of his desire was at the flood. There was a moment when he could have snapped the bonds that held him as though they were mere threads. There was a moment when he might have launched away on that voyage whose issue is "glory and honour and immortality, eternal life." One can almost hear through this story the sob of his spirit straining to be free. A single word would have loosed and liberated him, but the word was not spoken, and the tide within him ebbed. He

did not act in the hour when the deed of justice and honour was demanded, and he reached the moral disaster of the lost and castaway. So also every man has this pathetic struggle with its possible issue of loss. There are but two alternatives, and every man is either, by his words and deeds, hailing Christ as king or crucifying Him on the cross.

Thirdly, *the inevitable decision.* Now it is quite possible, and too common, for men to see that Jesus is the inevitable Christ and that they face an inevitable alternative, and yet never dream that they must make and are making an inevitable decision. They think that they can leave the question open and let themselves drift awhile. Pilate did not dream, when he delivered Jesus to be crucified, that he had gone out into the night of moral darkness from the presence of Christ. Above all, he did not realise this most momentous truth that this inevitable decision is often an unconscious decision. Men often decide for Christ, and as often decide against Him, and are only dimly aware, and sometimes wholly unaware, that they have decided at all. They may not know until years afterwards that in some decisive act they had taken their stand with Jesus.

This decision is not always silent, unmarked, unconfessed. There is an experience, completing and enriching, and to be coveted by all of us, of the hour when Christ the King of glory makes his appeal to us, and in full knowledge and with glowing heart we make a self-conscious surrender to Him. We humbly rest ourselves on Him for mercy and yield our lives to his obedience. The Bible sets that experience down in striking images. It calls it a passing from death to life, a coming out of darkness into marvellous light, a new birth, an entering into the Kingdom

of God, becoming a little child, a turning from the power of Satan to God, a knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. Some of you remember with a gratitude which only song and tears can express that quiet hour when you faced the inevitable alternative and made your decision. But will you be surprised when I say that I believe that fewer come with open self-conscious decision than is commonly thought? Men are born into a new spiritual world and pass from death to life, and, as in the natural world, are unaware of the change. Had Pilate only been true, had he taken his stand and refused to do his deed of wrong, had he only been brave enough to act up to the appeal of his conscience, had he only when he said to these accusers, "I find in Him no fault at all," bade his soldiers release Jesus, he would in that act have made his decision. When he scourged Christ he passed all unawares into the realm of spiritual death.

How often men make this inevitable decision and know it not. A schoolboy takes part in a thoughtless brawl and plays a dastard's part. He goes to his rest, and in the silence of the night the scene of his shame is recalled to him. His knowledge of his duty, his sense of what is high and honourable, his self-abasement for his deed, accuse and vex him. With tears upon his cheeks he makes a new decision. He has passed from death to life. A youth is seduced to attend a haunt of perilous amusement. As he looks on, the immodesty and coarseness of what he sees shock and ashame him. Never again, he purposes in his heart, shall this place find him among its company. He has passed from death to life. He has chosen Christ. A young girl learns of a home where there is need of the sympathy of a kindly heart and the help of a willing hand. She has been

living an idle, thoughtless, self-pleasing life. She goes down to the home, and in patient hours she relieves its needs. She has passed from death to life. She has chosen Christ. A man stands before some gross temptation to unjust gain. He wrestles in subtle argument with another who attempts to lead him into a shady transaction. He may never pray. He may never think of God. He may never even remember a definite word of Christ. But into his heart the light of Christ has shone. He rises to his feet with a quiet word of denial to his tempter. He has passed from death unto life. He has chosen Christ. In some day yet to come all these unconscious decisions shall be revealed and consummated in some open and uplifting public confession. But in the case of soul after soul Christ meets us and presses on us the two alternatives, and our first decision for Him is often as unconscious as it is inevitable.

To-day Christ stands before you pleading for your decision. You and I stand in Pilate's place facing this inevitable Christ, this inevitable alternative, and this inevitable decision. Yet there is one vast difference between our case and that of Pilate. We see Jesus as Pilate's eyes never beheld Him. He saw the simple Jewish enthusiast, the man of strange and bewildering speech, of such elevation of spirit that neither the soldier's scourging nor the mockery of the crown of thorns could rob Him of His calm. But we see Christ who was crucified and rose again from the dead, the master of the noblest spirits of all times, with many crowns on his head. The alternative before you is clearer and easier than it was to Pilate. What will you do with Jesus? One of two things you are doing. You are giving Him either a cross or a throne.

IX.—THE BLOOD OF JESUS

IX.

THE BLOOD OF JESUS.

"Then answered all the people, and said, His blood *be* on us, and on our children."—MATTHEW xxvii. 25.

WE never know how far words may go, and what strange message they may bear. Words lightly spoken, slipped as mere nothings from the tongue, are given a changed accent, an altered emphasis, an unexpected reference, and they become ominous with significance, or as prophetic as an oracle. It is marvellous how utterances take unthought-of and unconscious meanings. When Caiaphas, for example, cunningly argued, "It is expedient that one man should die for the nation," he did not understand the reach and grasp of the words he used with so sinister a purpose. When Pilate said, "Behold the Man!" he did not dream that Christian speech would render that "*Ecce homo*" with the accent of reverence. And when the priests, pacing up and down before the cross, said among themselves, "He saved others: Himself He cannot save," they did not think that their taunt would be repeated, not only as a splendid testimony to Jesus, but as the perfect expression of the law of His atoning sacrifice for men.

These words, "His blood be on us, and on our children," also pass on to sublime, holy, eternal significances. When they are first uttered, they are the hoarse, passionate

shout of men who, with blind bravado, accept the responsibility for the death of Jesus. The very form of them, "His blood—on us and on our children," declares that mob fury which finds vent in repeated exclamatory cries. They are the reckless answer of the multitude, roused to a lust for blood, to Pilate, dramatically washing his hands, and declaring his innocence. But some fifty days later, when the day of Pentecost is fully come, and Peter is standing up before the men of Israel, and fastening upon them his fearless charge, "Him . . . ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain," and conscience-stricken men, seeing the enormity of the crime, are pricked in their hearts, and cry out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" the words, "His blood be on us, and on our children," acquire a new and greatly altered significance. And when, in many an experience repeated down over the centuries, men and women, burdened with guilt, broken with penitence, who have scarcely dared to think of God, and of holiness, and of judgment to come, have looked up at the cross and understood, as only a penitent sinner can understand, its atoning and cleansing sacrifice, no more sweet and blessed breathing could they utter than, "His blood be on us, and on our children." These words may be uttered as the cry of the condemned, or the cry of the convicted, or the cry of the redeemed. They may express the sullen defiance of the impenitent; they may be used as the humble confession of the contrite; they may have the accent of believing faith. Which utterance is to be found on our lips?

I.

First: The Cry of the Condemned.—Never did men so lightly take an awful responsibility upon them as did the representatives of the Jewish people on the day of the cross. Never has any self-imposed malediction been so signally fulfilled. The one thing men care to remember about that tumultuous mob is, that they hurried Jesus to His death. The stigma with which the whole world brands the Jewish race is, that they are the children of the people whose eye did not pity, whose hand did not spare. The Jewish nation stands in the pillory for this deed. Not only when the Jew walks the market-places of our cities, or flees from merciless persecution, but even when he faces the heathen, who have learned only the rudiments of the story, the taunt he hears is that he is one of the children of those who crucified Jesus. "His blood is on them, and their children."

This cry has had a still more terrible fulfilment. The whole race is haunted by the deed. Have you seen a house reputed to be haunted? Some gruesome murder has been committed within its walls, and now it stands empty and desolate. Its grass-grown courts, its dirt-blinded windows, its rusty brasses, the evidences of its dreary neglect, proclaim its story. No happy faces look out at its windows, no cheerful voices re-echo within its rooms. The children fear to pass it by night, lest they should not pass it again. It is pitied as though it were a lost soul. Ah! there are no haunted houses, but there are haunted men and haunted nations. Deeds of wrong do haunt men like their shadow. They isolate and despiritualise. The Jews are a haunted race. Such strength of intellect, such power of government

such mastery in music, such gifts of speech, and such subtility of thought, mark the Jew as the first among men. How we long after this race so richly dowered, with their great history! How we feel our irredeemable debt to them! And yet they are the spiritual castaways of history. Their ambitions are earthly; their worship is a mummery; their former greatness of soul has suffered a profligate waste. Look at them as they crowd their famous market in Rotterdam; watch them as they pass in grave silence through the Ghettos of Venice or Rome; stand near them as they cling by the wall at the wailing place in Jerusalem! What is your thought? They are a haunted people. An irreparable wrong shadows them. His blood is on them, and on their children!

But this cry of the condemned is heard from more than the seed of Abraham, "He is not a Jew which is one outwardly." "He is a Jew which is one inwardly." Around Pilate's judgment-seat to-day almost the whole world is gathered. Jesus stands before us in the appeal of His holiness, His gentleness, His word of grace. "What shall I do, then, with Jesus, which is called Christ?" is the question put to all. And from human hearts, if not in the fierce accents of the human voice, the reply comes, "Let Him be crucified." When in greed you impoverish the poor, when in party-spirit you speak and vote for unrighteousness, when in the excitement of passion you deflower purity and decry holiness, when in pride you offend the lowly, when in envy you nourish evil thoughts against those who outshine you, when in ambition you sacrifice truth and honour, when you allow eager, earthly desires to desecrate your soul, when you are merciless and unscrupulous, vengeful and cruel, bitter and remorseless to men,

then you also crucify Christ. Aye, when love is scorned, and sacrifice flouted as the things of the dreamer and the enthusiast, you hurry Christ to His cross. And when you sit hardening your heart against all gracious appeal, turning away in grossness of heart from all that would awake conscience within you, when you join the company of those who will neither bow down before Christ's cross, nor bear it, you are, in silence, choosing your doom as decisively as though the words had been uttered, "His blood be on us, and on our children." With you it is the cry of the condemned.

II.

Secondly: The Cry of the Convicted.—As we first hear it this defiant shout is the cry of those upon whom the blood of Jesus rests for their condemnation. All sin which is loved and persisted in, which scorns rebuke and resists appeal, which recklessly disregards holiness, and makes light of God, is guilty of the blood of Christ. But when a man has realised the folly and degradation of his sin, when shame is bringing confusion in his thoughts, and remorse is gnawing at his heart, when he is passing through that experience we call conviction of sin, then these very words, with a new emphasis, may be on his lips.

Now, that conviction of sin which is wrought in the human soul by the Holy Spirit, never reaches its intensest anguish and its keenest sense of wrong, until it realises that the blood of Christ is upon it. The deepest, perhaps the only abiding and effectual conviction, is conviction by the cross. There are lesser sources of conviction. Few

men escape that sense of having wasted much of their lives, and lost their innocence, of having misused their gifts, and squandered their souls, which is always accompanied by regret and shame. You all remember how Burns conceives himself looking back on his wild and wayward life, his lost opportunities, his pathetically profligate career, and writing his own epitaph:—

> "This poor inhabitant below,
> Was quick to learn and wise to know,
> And keenly felt the friendly glow
> And softer flame;
> But thoughtless follies laid him low,
> And stained his name."*

The words are sad, and heavy with a conviction of sin—but it is a conviction arising only from the bitterness of sin's consequences, from the humiliating experiences of its issues, and the dark blot it makes on a man's fair fame. That is perhaps the commonest, but the least blessed of all conviction of sin.

A higher and nobler sense of conviction, more poignant in its regret and more fruitful of good, is that given by the law. When a human soul has realised the radiant beauty of holiness, when a conception of the supreme greatness of righteousness is borne in upon heart and conscience, when the clear voice of the demand for undeviating truth and unfaltering honour rings within a man, when the everlasting ought of high and holy duty, of reverence, and of gentle patience, besets the spirit, and he realises how low and grovelling have been his aims, how selfish and polluted has been his life, how tainted with iniquity is his inmost thought, then, despising himself, ashamed not only of what

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* "A Bard's Epitaph."

he has done, but of what he is, he feels the sense of conviction by the law. When Paul in his blind zealot rage was haling men and women to prison, justifying himself by a low standard of right, he was suddenly brought face to face with the law. Its awful and searching demand, "Thou shalt not covet," was an arresting call to him. He had almost run the gauntlet of the two tables of the law, but the spiritual reach and grasp of the last commandment held him, and in a flash, more vivid than the lightning that shone round him on the way to Damascus, he saw the ungodliness and iniquity of his deeds, and the abysmal corruption of his heart.

That is a great moment in the experience of a human soul. "Blessed is the man whom Thou chasteneth and teacheth out of Thy law." But that is not the deepest conviction either for Paul, or for any other man. The most abiding conviction is the conviction that there is blood upon our souls. One of the controlling minds* of our century has told us of that preacher of the Gospel, whose devotion burned with an unearthly fire, whose sympathy gave a thrill of hope to the most abandoned and despairing, whose love for the lifting up of the fallen nourished a zeal that ate him up. Beside the bed of one of his stricken penitents, despairing of herself, he told in words of pain, his own story of fall and shame; of one whom he had wronged, whose love had been her ruin, whose blood he felt was upon him. Just as Paul's deeper and more fruitful conviction was due to the unforgettable fact that the blood of Stephen was on his head, so this devout evangelist burned with a flame

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* George Eliot—"Janet's Repentance."

of ardour for the salvation of men, because he felt a constant sense of conviction. The guilt and stain of blood was upon his soul.

But the climax of all conviction of sin, without which no repentance is so deep and thorough as it ought to be, is to be guilty of the blood of Jesus. In one aspect, the cross of Christ is an event of the past; there are centuries between us and the hour when the Jewish mob hurried Him to Calvary, and looked with callous eyes when they saw the nails driven in. But the cross is a timeless wrong, a dateless sorrow, as it is an eternal sacrifice. The cross was set up not only by Jewish hands; that death was compassed by more than Jewish sins. Our sins also nailed Jesus to the tree; to this day we crucify afresh the Lord of Glory. It was your iniquity and mine that shed the blood of Jesus. Our temper, our hate, our malice, our covetousness, our indulgences, our stiff and sullen contempts, our mocking of truth and purity, our wicked ungodly words, our deeds of passion—these were the hands and voices that took Jesus to His cross and nailed Him to its spars. Not until, like Paul, we hear the voice saying with beseeching pain, "Why persecutest thou Me?" and realise that every sin smites and wounds Christ on His cross; not until we know that our transgressions brought Jesus to His death, and cry in a sincerity of shame: "His blood is on us, and our children," do we sound the depths of conviction.

Then can we understand, and in a deep contrition, which has seen the true heinousness of sin, which has seen that sin not only blasts our own souls, not only wrongs those we should love and protect, but reaches its enormity in smiting God, we can use that most poignant cry of human confession:

"Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight."

"O break, O break, hard heart of mine!
Thy weak self-love and guilty pride
His Pilate and His Judas were,
Jesus, our Love, is crucified!

"A broken heart, a fount of tears,
Ask, and they will not be denied;
A broken heart love's cradle is,
Jesus, our Love, is crucified."

III.

Thirdly: The Cry of the Redeemed.—"His blood—on us, and on our children" may be uttered not only with the hoarse shout of the passion-driven, and not only with the broken cry of the convicted, but also with the clear and humble voice of the redeemed. On their lips it is a song.

We wonder that there was no one in that excited mob, well acquainted with the symbolic meaning of blood, knowing its use in sacrifice, who did not catch the meaning that might underlie these words. There was One in whose ear the cry had a music no other could hear. Jesus stood before that judgment-seat, meek and silent. But as the words fell on His ear, His face lighted up with that joy no man could take from Him, and that cry of merciless hate became as holy to Him as a prophet's message. "His blood—on us, and on our children!" He saw the door-posts sprinkled with blood that the Angel of Death might pass over the people of God. He saw the Lamb slain for the great day of sacrifice. He saw the High Priest entering in within the veil, bearing the blood of atonement. He saw throughout time and in all the ages of

eternity the millions who should bow down to Him as the Apostle and High Priest of their profession, and should enter into peace, and freedom, and holiness, and should at last stand before His Throne and sing: "Thou wast slain and Thou hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood." Jesus heard the cry of the redeemed.

Who are these and whence came they who glory in these words? Jesus hears it to-day from the lips of young and gently nurtured souls, whose tender consciences are quick to feel the very shadow of evil, whose untainted hearts are smitten with shame at the very suggestion of sin. He hears it from young men and young women who have begun the adventure of life, who have felt that the very atmosphere they must breathe is laden with iniquity, who have had their purity besieged, their faith in God and in goodness assailed, who have felt the inward surge and swell of temptation, and have known hours of weakness and of shame. He hears it from those of older years, who have slipped and fallen, yielding to sins they thought they had left behind, mourning over the forgetfulness of their consecration, the breaking of their vows, the fading away of holy ideals. He hears it from the poor penitent whose sin has laid a lifelong burden on his life, whose shame is open to men, whose conscience has a wound that will hardly heal. He hears it from those saintly souls, whose illumined faces and hoar hair expound His Gospel to younger eyes, as with a deepening self-abasement, they confess their sin. He hears it, with faint breath, from the lips of the dying, who see how far astray their feet have wandered, and yet have hope in His cross. All of those voices blend in the great anthem of redemption: "His blood be on us, and on our children."

What is the experience all of them have passed through? What do they see as they look towards the cross? They see holiness, so spotless, so entrancing, that earth's highest and best is dull and faulty before it. They see love, not only smitten by pain, and moved to prayer, but pouring itself out in appealing grace. They see the sacrifice for their guilt and wrong.

From the cross there streams the light of the knowledge of the glory of God revealed in the face—the personality—of Jesus Christ. In the cross they see God not only setting their sins in its clear light, but bearing them away by His sacrifice. The blood of Jesus speaketh better things than the blood of Abel, for it speaks not only of innocence and meekness, and faithfulness, but of pardon and of peace, of cleansing and of power to become holy. Of all the things of Christ which the Holy Spirit of God shows to believing men, this sacrifice of the cross He makes to shine most glorious. As the first preachers of the evangel recall "that sight," as they realise its love and sorrow and grace, and as they feel its power, they proclaim its glory with one accord. We can understand the deep emotion of the strong spirit of Paul as he dictated: "He hath made us to be accepted in the Beloved, in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins." We can catch the exultant throb in Peter's heart when he wrote: "Ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation, received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." We reach the source of John's sure persuasion that "God is light, and in Him is no

darkness at all," when he declares that "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." And the orator of the New Testament touches his moment of intensest feeling when he cries: "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the Eternal Spirit, offered Himself, without spot, to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" And so on, through all this New Testament of the grace of God, a man may find the cry of the redeemed sounding and resounding as the *motif* note of it all. For it is not the grace which was in His lips, not the glory which men beheld, and still do behold, in His life, not even that adorable deed of the Incarnation, which is the sublimest truth to sinful men. The Church of Jesus has never exalted any one of them to the pre-eminence without loss. It is the cross and its redeeming sacrifice. And therefore the song which the whole ransomed Church shall sing, when it looks back with clearer eyes than are given to man on the earthly pilgrimage, is, "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

X.—THE REED IN HIS HAND

X.

THE REED IN HIS HAND.

"A reed in his right hand."—MATTHEW xxvii. 29.

ONE cannot help a feeling of surprise that the significance of the reed in Christ's hand has been so strangely overlooked. Even art, with its keenly discerning eye, has passed it by. We have become familiar with the interpretation of all the idylls of Christ's story by the devout painters of the past and the present. Jesus in his mother's arms, Jesus in the carpenter's shop, Jesus on the highway, Jesus by the lake shore, Jesus in the upper room, hang on every wall. The world's greatest artists have depicted the scenes of the cross with that passionate fervour it naturally inspires. They have shown us Jesus at Pilate's judgment seat, bound to the pillar while the soldier scourged Him, crowned with thorns, falling under the burden of his cross, and in every hour and act of his agony. How rare is the picture of Christ with the reed in his hand!

The story of the mocking of Jesus makes as sombre reading and as saddening as the story of the cross itself. It was a mark of that hard and cruel Pagan mind that when the death sentence had been passed the condemned man was given over to the rude and pitiless horse-play

of his guards. So the soldiers who kept Christ captive gathered the whole band, and for an hour made coarse ridicule of this Galilean peasant who claimed to be a king. One fetched an old faded scarlet tunic and cast it upon his shoulders to mimic the imperial purple. Another, with a deeper scorn, plucked a branch of a thorn bush from Pilate's garden and made a crown for his head. A third, with a keener sense of humour, plucked a reed, a slender, swaying, fragile thing, and put it into his right hand. Mark the significance of the reed. These soldiers were stumbling on eternal truths all unawares. The soldier's tunic is the garb of the conquering Christ. The crown of thorns is the emblem of Him who carried men's sorrows and lifted the curse from their lives. This reed is the symbol of Christ's rule and power. The kings of the earth wielded jewelled sceptres, two-edged swords, rods of brass and iron. But had these soldiers searched all nature they could not have found a symbol in such perfect character with the government of Christ. The soldiers thought it a cutting satire. It was exquisite truth. The tender heart and gentle ways and infinite compassion of Jesus were never more finely pictured than in Christ with the reed. Let us look into some of the truths symbolised by this sceptre of Christ.

I

To begin with, *this reed in his right hand is the symbol of his character.* When we speak of the character of Jesus we are looking up into the infinite blue. "The condemnation," says Hegel, "which a great man lays upon the world is to force it to explain him." All greatness is mysterious,

provoking, baffling. Mahomet remains a problem to the West, and a perplexing wonder even to the East. Shakespeare is still in the shadow with men guessing at his unknown personality. Napoleon Buonaparte provokes fresh enquiry and a new estimate in every generation. We are baffled by such greatness as these men had because of our imperfect knowledge of their lives, and the strange contradictions of their characters. But we know the life of Jesus. We are more familiar with his ways than with those of our dearest friend. We have been given free entry into his mind. It is the moral and spiritual sublimity of his character that remains the lonely, awful, and unscaleable height. No biography has ever disclosed his whole secret. The intense meditation of all the centuries has not searched out the fulness of his grace. And yet a little child, as he sings his simplest hymn, the first he learns at his mother's knee, can tell us what is the heavenliest beauty of the character of Christ. We bow in reverence before his goodness, his spiritual wisdom, his courage and candour and courtesy, his love for man and his passion for God. But the marvel of his character is what He Himself picked out when He said "I am meek and lowly in heart." It was his gentleness and tenderness and self-forgetting compassion that amazed his disciples and laid a spell upon them. "Ye know," said Paul, looking back on the miracle of this lowly life of Jesus, "the grace of the Lord Jesus, who though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through his poverty might be made rich." This is the mind of Christ, he elsewhere tells us, that He emptied Himself of His glory. What Paul saw, what all men now see in Jesus as the eclipsing vision, is the king with the reed.

That shines out in every turn of his life. He met insult and scorn and neglect with a calm brow and gentle eyes. They mocked at his birthplace. They ridiculed Him as the carpenter. They marked his accent with superior scorn. When He was reviled He reviled not again. He seldom resented any indignity to Himself. His rebukes were always gentle and entreating. The most open act of discourtesy ever paid Him was in the house of Simon the Pharisee. Simon gave Him no kiss of welcome and even no water for his feet. That wilful insult, so gross to Eastern minds, was meekly accepted, and would not have been mentioned had not his defence of the woman who wept in her penitence at his feet called forth his words. He could be hot with moral indignation. His eyes blazed at injustice and cruelty to others, at any contempt shown to his own. His words of withering condemnation shook men's hearts. But when He was Himself mocked and scorned, scourged and spat upon, He had only the reed in his hand.

Trench has brought out the spiritual greatness of this supreme trait in Christ's character in one of his most moving sonnets. He bids us think of the meekness and gentleness of Christ as He lives out his life in Palestine. He sets that self-humiliation against the background of his tender care for others. But he leads us into its deeper significance when he bids us remember that constant self-restraint of one who had but to speak a word to annihilate his foes.

> "He might have built a palace at a word,
> Who sometimes had not where to lay His head:
> Time was, and He who nourished crowds with bread,
> Would not one meal unto Himself afford:

Twelve legions girded with angelic sword,
Were at His beck, the scorned and buffeted.
He healed another's scratch, His own side bled,
Side, feet, and hands, with cruel piercings gored.
Oh, wonderful the wonders left undone!
And scarce less wonderful than those He wrought;
O self-restraint, passing all human thought;
To have all power, and be as having none:
O self-denying Love, which felt alone
For needs of others, never for its own."

That is the portrait of the king with the reed.

II.

In the second place, *this reed in his right hand is a symbol of his power.* There is no marvel in history greater than that of the conquests of Christ, and there is no miracle so marvellous as the means by which they have been achieved. We sometimes wonder at the seeming weakness of the forces He employed. He called no band of soldiers to his aid. He would wage no war. The only blow struck for Him He rebuked. "Put up thy sword," was his swift command. "They that take the sword shall perish with the sword." He disdained the forces which men continually call in to further their aims. He left behind Him no code of laws. He refused to ally Himself with wealth, and influence, and social standing. He dispensed with wisdom and genius, and even with learning. A lowly life, a gentle and appealing message, a selfless submission, a cross of shame, these were the weapons of Christ. He was a king with a reed in his hand.

No truth is more difficult for us to learn than this. The heresy that lurks in every heart is that if the Church

can only get figureheads, secure the allegiance of men of influence, enlist the wealth and power of the world to prevent its wrongs and to advance its interests, the Kingdom of Christ will quickly come. You know the story of that crusader who had read to him the record of the death of Christ. As the quiet voice recited the questioning and the mocking and the scourging, and came at length to the cruel piercing with the nails, the knight rose up in his uncontrollable anger and sorrow and broke in upon the reader to declare that had he and his trusty band been on yonder hill such deeds would not have been done. The honest soldier did not understand. He had never seen Christ with the reed. We also fail to understand that to this day Christ refuses every power but the power of the reed. He needs the things of the world for the work of the world. He needed the ass on which He rode into the city, the kindly homes of rest and solace, the quiet places for prayer and fellowship, the upper rooms for sacramental hours, the men and women with gifts of ministry and intercession. Christ can use all that earth and time can give—all wealth, all learning, all skill, all grace and charm. But these are not the forces on which He relies. He will use them only when willingly and humbly and sacrificingly given. He can do without them all. If there is no room in the inn, He will turn the manger into a cradle and lie with sweet content in it. If there is no home to welcome Him as He comes down from the temple, He will find a quiet resting-place in the Mount of Olives. If all men forsake Him and flee, He will go up the way of weeping alone. In the day when men think to use the wealth and power and skill of the worldly to advance Christ's

cause, or call in worldly authority and rank and station and the force of law to commend Christ, they are taking the reed out of his hand and putting some jewelled bauble or rod of iron in its stead.

I covet all the force and power, all the wisdom and learning, all the loveliness and charm of things seen for Christ. I look forward to the day when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord. On his head shall be many crowns. But I never dream that He will permit us to depend on these worldly things. I constantly fear lest we forget that "God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty, and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things that are not, to bring to nought things that are." As constantly do I fear that the sensuous, however seemly and beautiful, may be so valued as to rob us of the spiritual. I love a nobly designed and richly adorned house of prayer. I am moved to worship and to reverence by things beautiful. I rejoice in melodious and inspiring music. But when men begin to think that these are things of supreme moment, when they forget that they are only the expressions of a grace they cannot create, and that they may be merely the garb of sensuous and luxurious feeling, and the very habit of pride, then I go back to the king with the reed, and realise anew where lies the power of Christ and the power of the Church. "No longer can the Church say," remarked the monk to the visitor to whom he was showing the treasures, "Silver and gold have I none." To which the other swiftly and significantly replied, "Neither can she now say, In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, take up thy bed and walk." A

broad reading of history gives complete proof that when the Christian Church has forgotten where her power lies she has fallen on helplessness and feebleness and corruption. Then God in his mercy has stripped her bare. He has sent her into the wilderness. He has driven his faithful folk out from their stately houses of prayer, and even from the simple churches round whose walls their dear dead are lying. He has deprived them of ordered ritual and measured song. He has impoverished them even of the necessities of life. But then, when they have been driven and hunted from glen to glen, have rolled the psalm to wintry skies, and have borne their losses with meekness and offered their testimonies with a Christ-like submission, faith and hope and love have been reborn, and the Gospel has become the power of God unto salvation. They have become servants of the king with the reed.

III.

In the third place, *this reed in his right hand is the symbol of his ways.* A glance along the life of Christ captivates our hearts as this truth is seen on every page. Whether we go in with Him to his first miracle when He deals gently with the threatened shame of a bride's young face, or pass on to his last lowly deed, when He washed his disciples' feet and purged them of their sullen tempers, we find Him always pitiful, tender, gracious in his ways. When we see Him touching the leper, stooping over the daughter of Jairus with his soft call, "My little lammie, arise!" restoring the widow's son to her arms again, feeding the famished multitudes and refusing to send them hungry

away, calling Zacchaeus, that poor, defaced, self-despising soul, a child of Abraham, we always note the tenderness and sympathy and gentleness of his ways. But to see Christ most clearly as one who does not break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax, we must mark Him when He is dealing with sin. When the woman taken in adultery was brought to Him He stooped to write upon the ground, lifting his eyes only to look upon her in entreating pity when she was left alone, and to speak his word of release. When the woman who was a sinner knelt behind Him at his feet He felt with a keener pain than hers the scorn of the eyes of those who marked her. When the dying thief leaned out towards Him on the cross He answered him as a king might have made response to a courtier from his throne. Jesus never recalls the wrong. He has no word of rebuke. He never utters even a stern admonition. It is always a word of hope and courage and gentle confidence. He deals with the lost and the castaway after the manner of the king with the reed.

There is one scene in the Gospels, and it is to be found in all the Gospels, which reveals these gentle ways of Christ as no other incident has done. That scene took place in the High Priest's courtyard, when Jesus stands awaiting his trial at the coming dawn. It is the scene in which Peter denies Him. There is one kind of offence which we all find it most difficult to forgive. That is a wilful and deliberate personal wrong. And if the wrong be the wound of a friend, there is no salve which can heal it. Never, we may humanly say, was the meekness and gentleness of Christ so searched and tested. Can you gauge the pain of Jesus when the words "I know not the man," with their accompanying oath, fell upon

his ear? To be left alone, to find the friend whom one has trusted failing us, to hear passionate words of denial, and to have this done when the heart is eager for a single word or even a glance of sympathy, what human heart could brook it! Shakespeare has finely divined the moment of Wolsey's keenest anguish to be that in which he finds himself denied by the king for whom he had risked his honour. The dramatist makes him exclaim in those words whose poignancy prevents them becoming commonplace:—

> "Had I but served my God with half the zeal
> I served my king, He would not in mine age
> Have left me naked to mine enemies."

But Christ has no word of reproach. He does not meet the recreant with a glance of steely scorn. "The Lord turned and looked on Peter." It was the look of a wronged lover in the yearning of an unquenched desire. It did not keep Peter's eyes from tears, but it kept his feet from falling and his soul from death. It was the look of the king with the reed.

IV.

There are two truths which have been pressing upon us all through this consideration of the crowning grace of Christ, which I would enforce as I close. The first is that we have here *a disclosure of God's ways with men.* God is Himself the king with the reed. He cannot always be indulgent, and He will not always strive with men. There are great times of judgment when He sends forth the angels as reapers into the harvest field, and

the day of reward and retribution has come. But such days of judgment come only when the gentleness and tenderness of God and the deeds of His compassion hath failed to break our hard hearts, and to wean us from our sins. Oh! the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy. He deals patiently with the worst, hopefully with the despairing, tenderly with the man who has sunk deepest in the mire. There is always a soft spot left in the hardest heart, some sweet memory in the most desecrated mind, some pure affection in the foulest nature, and God is ever patient, gentle, hopeful, eager to bring forth a tender plant out of the most arid soil. The man who has set his face towards spiritual death does not know how often God has striven to woo him from his evil way. The man who has made his bed in hell does not know that even there God besets him behind and before. And He is as patient with the weak and discouraged and disappointed, with men who have failed and fallen in the fierce competitions of the world and have lost heart in life, with the ailing and the old and the baffled. They have no king but the king with the reed. You know it all in his dealing with you. The blow you feared did not fall. The calamity which made your heart sick with apprehension passed by your door. The loss which threatened to impoverish your life was not sustained. The sickness which weakened your strength passed away. The poverty and loneliness which you looked forward to with a shadowed heart were strangely relieved. The penalty which should have followed your sin was not inflicted. Have you ever wondered why God so dealt with you? You will find the answer to your question in the ways of Christ. It is the dealing of the king with the reed.

The second truth, that we have *a declaration of what God wishes us to be.* I sometimes wonder that no voice from heaven broke the silence of these hours of mockery and insult. It was, I suppose, the essential element of Christ's cross that He must tread the winepress alone. Twice before, at his baptism and at his transfiguration, God had broken through his restraint. The father's heart cried out in the hour of its rapture. Had God spoken now, He would have repeated the old and perfect word, "This is My beloved son, in whom I am well pleased." Never did the lovelight fill the Father's eyes with a more wondrous shining than when Jesus stood as the king with the reed.

That is what God would have us to be, in our character, in the forces we use, and in the ways of our life. It may seem noble to carry the head high and to care for no man. It may seem brave to be arrogant and self-sufficient. It may seem vastly clever to be contemptuous, sarcastic, and satirical in speech, scornful in glance, intolerant of the weak and imperfect. It may seem strong to be exacting and unforbearing and unforgiving. It may seem courageous to be resentful, and to make men fear how they meddle with us. But that is only the nobility and bravery and strength of a Pagan heart. God never looked upon a Pagan heart except with pity for its ignorance, and grief for its hardness and narrowness. That is not to be noble and brave and strong after the manner of the king with the reed. To be gentle and courteous, forgiving and self-effacing, to purge our hearts of pride and envy and greed, to suffer silently and without making reprisals, to put on bowels of mercy, meekness, and gentleness,—that is to put on Christ. It is not difficult to be stiff with pride, stilted with conceit, unapproachable in our haughti-

ness, swift in our counterblow. It is difficult to cherish in our heart the thought,

> "If I can keep one human heart from breaking,
> I have not lived in vain."

But that is to mirror the king with the reed, and to be what God craves us to be.

XI.—SIMON OF CYRENE

XI.

SIMON OF CYRENE.

"And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear His cross."—MARK xv. 21.

IN the early history of Israel it would have been impossible to find a Hebrew beyond the shadow of the rugged mountain ridge that lifts itself between the Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea. With a stubborn loyalty, born of the memory of a great spiritual past, and nourished by the hopes of a greater future, the Hebrews clung to the hills which had been the sanctuary of their faith. But captivity and exile had bewildered the people's mind, long centuries of oppression and exaction had impoverished their land, and the later years of alien rule had broken their spirit. The Hebrew was weaned from his inborn love for his native soil, every high road that led out of Palestine saw the poverty-stricken Jew leaving his desecrated land, and every city saw his unchanging features in its streets, and found his tireless energy competing in its industries.

But the Jew made no home in any of the countries in which the race was scattered abroad. Whether he went East or West, one spot held him in a holy devotion. Like the exiled Scot, who in his dreams beholds the Hebrides, the blue hills of Judæa never sank below the

horizon of the Hebrew imagination. "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning," was the psalm that stirred his heart. And in these families of the twelve tribes scattered abroad, sons were born, who were given the great names of Moses and Samuel, and Jacob, and Simeon, and Saul, and Benjamin, and taught to read, with an enthralling patriotism, the story of Abraham's faith, and to chant the psalms of Israel. And when they grew to manhood, the fire kindled by their fathers' devotion burst into a flame of desire to see Jerusalem, to walk the streets of the city where God had chosen to make known His name, to take part in its Passover Feast, and to nourish their faith at the altars of the fatherland.

In one of these homes, in Cyrene, a town on the north coast of Africa, a son was born, just as Saul was born in Tarsus. His intensely Jewish name, Simeon, declares his father's faith. He felt the fire of devotion burning in his bones when he came to manhood, and he turned his face towards the Holy City. "My feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem, whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord." But like many more who thronged Jerusalem at the time of the Passover, he could find no dwelling-place within the city walls, and he sought out a lodging in the country. Morning by morning, just as Jesus did, he went his way into the city, and when the evening was come, he went out to his Bethany, and lodged there. The night before the day of preparation, this devout Jew lay down in peace in his sweet country lodging-place, and he awoke in holy calm, and made his way through fields, gleaming with the

scarlet anemones of spring, musical with the bleating of the lambs, to the Temple of God. His heart was filled with Passover gladness, but he did not know the things that awaited him there.

That same night in which Simon had slept his deep, untroubled sleep, had been spent by another in a different way. First, in an upper room within the city walls; then in a garden called Gethsemane; and then, as the chill hours of the morning passed away, in the courtyard of a judgment hall, while callous soldiers kept their watch, Jesus spent its sleepless hours. But when the morning sun has come to its strength—just as Simon, with exultant heart, is passing in through the gates, the events of the night have come to their issue. Jesus comes forth bearing the two beams to make His cross. He must carry them to Calvary. But the true body and the reasonable soul of Jesus had spent their utmost strength. He who hungered and thirsted, who sat in weariness by the well, who fell asleep, outworn and weary in the midst of the storm, was led out of the judgment hall, utterly spent. Fifteen hours had passed away since He stooped to wash the disciples' feet. With what deeds and thoughts and emotions had these hours been filled! Have you ever kept vigil by some sick-bed with anxious heart a whole night through? What must it have been to stand, bound with thongs, as its hours drip slowly away! Have you ever been a witness in a court of law when a keen advocate searched your memory and dissected your knowledge? What must it have been to face betraying disciples, false witnesses, accusing priests, a craven and corruptible judge! Have you spent a long night in restless pain, and felt how sweet was the blush of dawn? What must it have been

to feel the bite of the scorpion scourge, and to find the place of standing spotted by blood! Have you spent a whole night with the burden of some shame on your spirit, facing some crisis whose momentous importance banished rest? What must it have been to bear the sin of men, and to know that the morning light would bring only a cross. It is no marvel that when its beams are placed upon Him, He finds its burden greater than He can bear. He staggers and sways, and falls. The soldiers look round for some one to take His place. They would not have borne the accursed wood for any criminal. They dared not lay hands on any priest, or suggest such an insult to one of the populace. Here is this stranger, who has pressed in through the crowd, and now looks on in pity at the sight. This unknown man, this pilgrim from the South, will serve the purpose. The soldiers' strong hands seize him, he is dragged from his standing-place in the crowd, the beams are laid upon his shoulders, and, with soldiers before and soldiers behind, within lines of flashing steel, Jesus and Simon march on—and Simon of Cyrene bears the cross of Jesus.

How singular is that story! How full of interest! How much fuller of significance! How singular that this man of Cyrene, this stranger in Jerusalem, should play so conspicuous a part in its most historic deed! How arresting is it that this man, going up with joyous heart and shining eyes, should be suddenly thrust into this tragedy! God leads us by paths that are not known. What a picture for an artist! Those who looked upon him that day thought that an evil hap had befallen him. Rude jests fell from the soldiers' lips as he was numbered with the transgressors. Very certainly he deeply pitied himself. But

this is what is beating in the minds of these Evangelists, as they engross his name on their page, that to no man was there ever given a higher honour than to Simon of Cyrene. Had the people made obeisance to him and offered him a crown, or had the riches of Solomon been laid at his feet, or had he been suddenly endowed with all of gift and charm that a human heart can desire, his would have been but a poor and paltry and passing grace, compared to the matchless honour conferred upon him when that Roman press-gang compelled him to carry the cross of Jesus.

There is more than a picture here, there is a parable for the soul. Let us understand not only the honour of the deed, but its blessedness. No one can ever do for Jesus precisely what Simon did. And yet in spirit, in the words and deeds of our daily lives, and pre-eminently in the greater hours of trial and sorrow, what we are called upon to do is this very thing—to walk in the way after Jesus, and to carry His cross.

I.

First: Mark *the greatness of the service Simon did for Jesus.*—As often as our thoughts are true and our love to Jesus rises in flood, we all have a blameless envy of those who did Him service. We know no distinction to compare with theirs. The women who ministered to Him; Martha, who made Him a supper; Mary, who poured her spikenard over His head; Joseph, who gave Him a grave, stand out above all the benefactors of men. All the pre-eminences and attainments of time are less than vanity compared to theirs. But if you will give rank to the

services rendered to Jesus, if you will pitch upon the greatest deed done for Him—next to that supreme office of the woman who nursed Him in her bosom and gave Him suck at her breasts—easily first of all is this deed of Simon in bearing His cross.

To this day, the greatest service to be done for Christ is to carry His cross. It is a great service to Jesus to preach His Gospel, if a man so preach in the power of the Holy Ghost that men shall see Jesus, and be drawn to Him. It is a comely service to care for His poor, and lift their burdens from them. It is a thing most beautiful to visit His sick, and to comfort His sorrowing. It is the service of a noble spirit to endow His cause with costly and self-sacrificing gifts. I would not speak lightly of these services. Jesus needs them all. But none of these match in greatness, in power, and in blessing, the bearing of His cross. For to bear the cross of Jesus is to do for Him, in the eyes of men, what He now no longer can do for Himself. For, as has been finely said, to bear the cross of Christ is to live purely in a world of sin; to be just and true and loving in a world of iniquity, and falsehood, and hatred; to suffer, when need requires, for the sake of truth; to sacrifice all else at the call of duty for the love of God; to care, beyond all other things, for God's service, and God's glory, and the kindling of the same desire in the hearts of others. To bear the cross of Christ is to give up one's own will for Christ's sake, to accept a hard lot with meekness, to bear a heavy burden without complaint. To bear the cross of Christ is to have our heart burdened and grieved by the sin of men, and in our measure, bear their sin, and suffering, and shame. For though we must never forget that Christ had a cross, which

He and He alone could bear, and that His cross is the one unapproachable source of all spiritual healing, yet as we bear our cross we most mightily preach His Gospel, and become channels of its power.

Oh! my fellow-men, what cross has untimely circumstance or stern misfortune, or the sin of man been laying on your shoulders? What blot of birth or infirmity of body, or calamity of life burdens your days? What trial to temper, or patience, or faith do you suffer? What great duty, what difficult renunciation, what self-sacrifice has been exacted from you? These are but the avenues in which you must bear the cross after Christ. That is the greatest service you do for Him. If we walked the streets clothed in that saintly meekness and humility which proclaims us the children of the Kingdom of God; if we lived in our homes wearing the chastened beauty of holy self-denial; if we went forth to our toil, disdaining all unearned wage, and tainted profit; if in daily duty and intercourse we denied ourselves, bore wrong uncomplainingly, and with perfect patience witnessed for Christ our Lord, I tell you, miracles would be wrought. A new air would breathe through the city, a new grace be heard in men's speech, a new beauty be seen in their deeds, a new spirit fill the hearts of master and servant, of rich and poor, and a new Gospel, which even the hardened and criminal could not resist, would win men to Christ. For the greatest service to be done for Christ is to carry His cross.

II.

Mark, in the second place, *the greatness of Simon's reward.* Christ never allowed any honour paid to Him, or any

service done to Him to pass unrewarded. When a village girl asked Him to her wedding feast, He turned the water into wine. When a humble home offered Him hospitality on the Sabbath day, He touched its mistress, and expelled her fever. When a Samaritan gave Him a draught from the well, He gave her to drink of the Living Water. When a poor, abandoned, city waif stooped to kiss His feet, He sent her out with a blessing of peace. No cup of cold water given to Christ ever lost its reward. And this pre-eminent service done by Simon enjoyed its great reward.

What was that reward? It was the deepest desire of his heart. Perhaps you say it was his own salvation. There is little doubt that he became Christ's disciple. It would have been contrary both to nature and to grace, that any man should come so near Jesus, and should do so much for Him, and not be called into His Kingdom. But as I read the evangelists, I conceive that Simon's reward was greater than the saving of his own soul. It was the answer of his most instant and constant and urgent prayers. Away in Cyrene this pilgrim to the Holy City had left two little sons, and as he looked upon them, exiles from the land of Israel, as he taught them the fear of the God of Jacob, the very passion of his heart was distilled into prayer, that they might grow in the faith and obedience of God. I put it to you here, who remember your fathers' counsels and prayers; I put it to you who have sons given you to bring up for God, if it be not the most fervent appeal of a father's prayers, that his sons might walk in the truth. The one sorrow that would smite with an unassuagable pain would be their profligacy, and the one joy that would outshine every other would be their thirst for God. Christ read the heart of His cross-bearer as he

walked by His side. He saw the names, Rufus and Alexander, graven on Simon's heart. And the great reward was given to Simon of seeing both his sons known and loved and honoured in the Church of Christ. As I read a father's heart, I do not know whether he was prouder of the deed done for Jesus, or of the holy fame of being the father of Alexander and Rufus.

To this hour that is one of the rewards of cross-bearing. It is not given to every man of God to have his sons follow in his steps. So many influences may bear in upon the impressionable heart of youth, that a father's counsel may remain unheeded, and a father's example be scorned. But no man shall ever bear the cross of Christ without reaping a reward in his children. In the brave Disruption days in Scotland, of which I may speak without heat or passion, (for whatever be your judgment on the cause, there is no man who does not honour the deed), there were men who bore the cross after Jesus. Not only, and not chiefly, by those in the ranks of the ministry, who found fame shining on the path of sacrifice, but by many in obscure homes the stern cross was accepted. By costly sacrifice, by long years of patient self-denial, by the enduring of scorn and the suffering of loss, these men and women followed Christ. They left behind them the house of prayer round which their dead were lying; they stood on the moors in the bitter winter blasts of 1844, and by the sea-shore, where their psalms were mingled with the hoarse chant of the waves; they refused emolument and advantage for conscience sake; they poured with unstinting hand the gifts of their poverty into the common cause; they turned their faces from friendships it broke their hearts to lose—

they bore the cross of Christ. And mark their reward. Their children to-day stand strong in the faith and devotion of Christ; their sons' names are loved and honoured in the Church; they are loyal to every cause which promotes the righteousness of the people. When you question them they will tell you that their faith was kindled by their father's sacrifice. He bore a cross for Jesus.

Oh, ye who are fathers, what do ye mean to leave your sons? You toil until your strength is sapped. You serve in difficult posts, and wait assiduously on fortune. You strain to leave a competence behind you for your children, and you guard and double guard your endowments and investments. But, oh, the pity of it—the pity of it! how often a father's carefully gathered hoard is only a fund to feed the son's vices, a means of blasting and squandering his soul. Why are there so many sons disloyal to the principles their fathers cherished and the Church their fathers loved? I show unto you a more excellent way. Take up the cross of Christ, take it up in the way that will surely offer itself to you—in your loyalty to some despised Church; in your continuance in some costly service; in your forbearance with wrong-doers; in your exclusion from much that is proud and bright and joyous in the world. Count its loss a luxury, and its shame a triumph. Then you may leave your son as poor as your father left you, but you will leave him a legacy which he will not waste—the imperishable memory of a father who carried the cross after Jesus. When the grass is growing green over your grave, your children's names shall be dear to believing men, and the whole Church shall rise up and call you blessed.

III.

Mark, in the third place, *the greatness of Simon's opportunity.* That Simon should have been coming into the city as Jesus was coming out might be called a strange coincidence. It was more. It was the predestination of God. That was the predestined moment when Simon's opportunity came to him. It was the moment when he was compelled to be alone with Christ. It was a golden opportunity. How Simon used it we can do more than guess. He might have struggled, like a galled ox, burning with deep resentment at the wrong done to him. He might have carried off his contumely with a bravado which would have appealed to the humour of the crowd But this devout pilgrim had a spirit prepared for another way. He was precisely the man to profit by being alone with Jesus. We dare not say that any unreported words, or soft whisper, passed from Jesus to Simon. But we can be sure that Jesus turned and looked on Simon—a look of human gratitude and of Divine compassion, and of irresistible appeal. He could not resist the Divine look. Simon saw, on the way to Calvary, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. No man ever saw the face of God and lived. And as Simon looked into the face of Christ, the old nature died within him, and he knew the Lord.

There is such a predestined moment in every life. The urgent need of many souls, and the peculiar opportunity of God's Holy Spirit, is that they know themselves to be alone with Jesus. In this busy life, when the world is too much with us, when the old silences and privacies seem to be impossible for many, there are many souls who are never

alone with Jesus. God makes the opportunity for them. For some it is made by a low, easily-hushed call in their unsullied youth; for others it is reached in the gentle providences of God; for others it is gained by the arresting words of some persuasive counsel. It is a blessedness, which is a joy for ever, for a man to know himself compelled to be alone with Jesus through these simple and easy devices of God. But others, like Simon of Cyrene, do not reach it until some cross is laid upon their shoulders, and they are compelled to walk in the *via dolorosa* with Jesus. Is there any man here who has been suddenly thrust into some tragedy, any man whose life purpose has come to nothing, any man who has found overmastering circumstances breaking his life in two, any man who is dazed with a stroke of sorrow? What is the meaning of it? Your cross is laid upon you, that it may give you the great opportunity of your life; that you may realise, although you walk one of life's busiest ways, and sit here in a throng of men, that you are alone with Jesus, and you have only to look up and meet the Divine look of longing and appeal, to carry your cross, as Simon did, with heroic faith, after Jesus. How will you use this predestined moment in your life? Do not writhe under your cross, do not escape from it, do not become hardened by it. Take it up, and as you bear it, be sure that One is looking upon you, seeking the answering look, and eager to bestow upon you that blessing which is the germ of all the greatness God can give here and hereafter.

XII.—THE WOMEN OF JERUSALEM

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THE WOMEN OF JERUSALEM.

"And there followed Him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented Him."—LUKE xxiii. 27.

IT was in the early morning, while the crowded city slept, that Jesus endured His hours of scorn and injustice and unspeakable insult. It was full forenoon, and every Khan had poured forth its pilgrim guests into the narrow streets, when Jesus was led forth to His death. The mob who had surrounded Pilate's judgment-seat was swollen by these strangers, and by the eager town's-people thrilling with the expectation of a tragedy, excited by rumour's strange tales. "A great company of people followed Him," but no friendly face looked out upon him. They were now awed and silent, for no man is so brutal and so sunken as not to be solemnised and stilled by the near presence of death. But the stillness, broken only by the irregular tramp of the jostling throng, was suddenly pierced by an outburst of Oriental lamentation. The wailing came from the women, who formed a compact company in the crowd. They were the women of the common people. The wife of scribe or priest would not have been found there. They carried their children in their arms, or led them in their hands, as working folk must do when they go abroad. As the wild cries of these daughters of Jerusalem fell on the ears of Jesus, He stopped, and the whole procession stopped with Him. He

turned, and looked towards the women, and in the silence, He rebuked their tears for Him with gentle chiding, and in a still tenderer compassion, He bade them weep for the destiny He saw already shadowing them and their children.

Now, very plainly that incident has been detailed, because it sets in a strong light the relation of Jesus to womanhood. The evangelist feels that these women are typical of universal womanhood, and that the act and words of Jesus reveal His mind. And so we find three things impressed upon us as we ponder the story. First, the moral and spiritual appeal Jesus makes to womanhood; second, His compassion for womanhood; and third, His message to womanhood. Let us take these in order.

I.

First: The Moral and Spiritual Appeal Jesus makes to Womanhood.—It is a commonplace we should never be weary in repeating and rejoicing over, that between Jesus and women there was an instant and elective sympathy. Thrice only did any word of strong chiding fall from His lips upon a woman's ears. He hushed Mary's too eager prompting at the marriage feast; he reproached Martha for her needless worry for His comfort; and He rebuked the woman who was guilty of indelicate word and offensive cant when she cried, "Blessed is the womb that bare Thee, and the paps which Thou hast sucked." But for the women who crowd the Gospel story He has, as a rule, no words but words of peace, and no deed but deeds of grace. The Gospel of Luke—the gospel of the human and domestic affections—is more apt and eager

to mark this innate sympathy than any other. It is Luke who has given us the gospel of the infancy, with its stately portrait of Elizabeth, and its revelation of the holy and submissive heart of Mary. It is Luke who has enrolled Anna among the prophets. Luke alone makes large mention of the ministry of the women of Galilee, tells us the pathetic idyll of the woman who was a sinner, and takes us into the home life of Martha and Mary. And here he marks the women of Jerusalem—not merely to set their pity in contrast to the unrelenting hate of the priests, and not simply to show how a deep and passionate grief will break all laws of convention and propriety, but to emphasise the truth, that Jesus makes a moral and spiritual appeal to womanhood.

What did these women see in Jesus? We must not, in sentimental imaginativeness, credit them with the insight of a personal faith and love. These women must not be classed with Mary of Bethany, who sat at Jesus' feet, whose insight divined the hour in which to pour her spikenard on His head. They were simple, working women, whose busy lives gave few opportunities. It would be too much to say that they were ready to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah. No; but they knew of the strokes of the scourge; they saw the pallor of weakness on His cheek, and the sweat of exhaustion on His brow; they remembered His deeds of mercy, His love and longing for their children, His compassion on their sick; they were wounded in heart for the unjust and merciless wrongs He bore; and now, as He walked in the majesty of His holiness, the contrast between Him and the background of envious and brutal hate entered their hearts with its irresistible appeal. It was as though they saw the pillar of

cloud in the desert, and all their thoughts were drawn to goodness and to God. It was the woman's heart which saw past all base charge and accusation, past all scorn and contumely, past all arrogant denial by priest and scribe, into the very secret of Jesus, and made loyal response with its sympathetic tears.

To this day Jesus makes the same moral and spiritual appeal to womanhood. The dear mothers who taught us God before they left us for the silent skies, could not have entered the lists of debate with a militant denier of the miraculous, but they understood the miracle of the virgin life and spiritual grace of Jesus, and they never faltered in their faith in Him as Lord. The devout women who gather in the meetings for prayer have no skilful apologetic, potent in the schools, upon their lips, but they hear the word which is dark to others. The things hidden from the wise and prudent are revealed to them. And those humble women, whose years are an unceasing drudgery, whose hands do daily the deeds of patient service until even the angels wonder, who wist not that their faces shine, whose hearts are meek and lowly amid the pride and strife of time, see Jesus, as priest and scribe never see Him, and feel in their toil and sorrow the consoling power of His moral and spiritual appeal. It is these women who support the Church of Jesus, who find it the sanctuary of their souls, and the sphere of many lovely ministries. It is a taunt upon coarse lips that the Church is their solace and strength. Yes, as long as Jesus walks among the golden candlesticks, as long as He sits down among His worshipping people and makes the place of His feet glorious, as long as He is to be seen, in the visions of the sanctuary, walking in His ineffable holiness and

speaking with His voice of pity as He passes to His cross, so long will women respond to His moral and spiritual appeal, and, wiser than the learned, proclaim Him Lord.

II.

Secondly: His Compassion for Womanhood.—Jesus did not disdain these women's tears. They were a solace in His loneliness and sorrow. But He could not suffer them to misinterpret His mind to the dull-minded mob. He was going to His cross in the high elation of His sinlessness, of His unfaltering faith, of His consecration, and of His spiritual desire for men. It is a needless sorrow to overmuch lament the wounds by which the hero wins his triumph, or to mark the way of victorious sacrifice by tears. "Weep not for Me," He calls, as He hushes the outburst of wailing. "Weep for yourselves and for your children." He sees again the sight He saw when He Himself wept over the city. He sees Jerusalem compassed about with armies, her walls battered into ruins, her Temple burned up with fire, her people fleeing for refuge to the surrounding hills, the city sitting desolate which once sat as a queen. And in the horror of siege and sally, in the sore suffering of hunger and thirst, in the midst of the mad fury of Zealot cruelty and Roman revenge, then, as always, when sin is finished and has brought forth its various deaths, He saw the heaviest and most pitiless stroke falling upon womanhood. It is the mother and her children who shall pass through the hottest furnace. It is the mother, who has found woman's supreme joy of motherhood become a curse, who shall cry: "Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck."

"Behold the days are coming," said Jesus to these daughters of Jerusalem. It may be they could as little understand His prophecy as could any of the blind Sadducees who chafed at this interruption in the progress to the cross. But He spoke through them to all generations, and proclaimed His Divine compassion for womanhood in all days that are to come. Ah, sirs, it may seem a platitude to you now. It was a new, a strange, an incredible grace then. It is yet almost unknown where the word of Jesus has not cleansed the eyes of men. And although Christendom has learned in great measure this attitude of the mind of Jesus, yet now and then some brutal deed in one of the alleys of our cities, or some dastard cowardice as a ship sinks in mid-ocean, or some coarse and blockish insult to womanhood in her hour, make one pause in doubt. And yet, despite the chivalries and courtesies which environ womanhood in Christian society, how dreadful is the truth of this prophetic word! When war desolates a land, and the soil is stained with blood, the sharp sword turns its keenest edge upon the woman, and pierces her heart, as she sits bereaved of her husband and her sons. When famine is blackening the faces of the millions in the great dependency, it is the women whose ears hungry voices assail, whose dry breasts starving children suck, who feel the keenest agony. When a complex civilisation has gathered men and women into its over-grown cities, and compelled its toilers to work in close and dusty factories, at unwholesome trades, and among poisonous materials, has housed them in long lines of mean streets, and set them to eke out existence on a scanty wage, it is the women and children who faint and die under

the travail. How many pinched and starved faces look out at one with a pathetic hopelessness from the windows of those one-roomed homes! How many little children are carried forth from them to untimely graves! And yet it may be that this also is of the compassion of Jesus, who has gathered those children with His arm, and taken them away from the evil to come. And when the man has made wild rebellion against order and purity, when crime is staining his hands, and drunkenness corrupting his blood, and lust is rioting in its waste of shame, how almost unbearable is the thought of the wrongs suffered by the woman and children. The poor stunted bodies, the scrofulous blood, whose outbreak will not heal, the wandering and disordered minds, the very eyes looking out with the shame of another's guilt darting across them; and then the awful suffering hidden away, borne with a moan which few ears are allowed to hear, for outraged chastity, for the hollow mockery of home, for hope long since dead, for broken hearts. Ah, how many still cry, "Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck." Who can walk the streets, who can listen to the sad histories of family life, who can witness the stern and losing battle with adverse circumstances, with its haunting fear of miserable poverty; who has ever had revealed to him vexed and disappointed hearts of loving women, who must both work and weep, and not catch the sob in the words of Jesus as He saw these sights down all the centuries, and cries: "Weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children."

Ah! my fellow-men, I charge you that you lay this compassion of Jesus for womanhood on your own hearts. Let

it give you a fine grace and deference in your speech; let it make you generous in your thoughts of woman in her tempted hours; let it stir you up to wiser and more strenuous efforts to lift her heavy burdens; let it make you abound in the first of all chivalries—a watchful and jealous care for her holy chastity; let it fill you with tender and reverent thoughts, until you shall so put on the Lord Jesus Christ, that His compassion shall shine through you, and every woman shall feel that your very shadow passing by bestows a blessing on her.

III.

Thirdly: His Message to Womanhood.—Jesus had more than this sad prophecy of compassion for these daughters of Jerusalem. He had a message to give to their terrified and trembling hearts. With His unfailing grace He sets it in a familiar proverb, dear as all proverbs are to simple, untutored minds, and so easily remembered, that in the days to come it echoed in their ears: "For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" It is the last message of Jesus, for with these words He ceased His public ministry, and it is a message to womanhood. The meaning of this short parable cannot be missed. If in these days of this fanatical city's progress to moral death such deeds as these are done in its streets, how much more ruthless and cruel shall be the scenes of horror and of vengeance in the days when that progress shall be completed, when the cup of her iniquity shall be full, when she shall have come to her hopeless corruption. Here merciless unrighteousness has been haling innocence to the cross, but not without protest and not without tears. The tree is still green. But then unrighteousness shall have run its

course, and the awful retribution that sweeps away guilty and innocent shall fall upon the city, in which no spark of moral energy shall be left. The tree will be dry—ripe for the fire.

What is the message to womanhood from this solemn parable? It is wrapped up in it, but it was left unspoken. This stopping and turning on the way to the cross, this hushing of the multitude that one last word might be spoken was no part of the official programme for the day. The frown gathered upon the priest's brow. Impatience chafed in the prompt and callous soldier's heart. The Roman guard press their prisoner on, and His face is turned once more towards the place called Calvary, and the call and counsel remain unuttered. It is locked up in the parable. But what that message is we know with certainty. When Jesus wept over the city He set His doom in a companion figure: "Whithersoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together." And there then followed the counsels to watchfulness and to faithfulness in service, and the promises of blessing to those who should do deeds of mercy to His little ones. And so the message here is an appeal for prayerfulness, for loyalty to righteousness, for a large-minded and patient charity. Nothing could save Jerusalem now, but if its women will abide in prayer, if they will be loyal to truth and to purity, if they will busy their hands in the holy service of the sick and the poor, they and theirs shall be remembered when the anger of the Lord is kindled against Jerusalem.

That is the ruling note of Christ's message to womanhood. It is not her part to determine the policy of the State, or to sit in the councils of the Church, or to take

service in the field, or to join the ranks of the captains of industry. Some few may fill high posts in public life, but they must ever remain few. But it is the woman's part to do something higher, holier, more potent still. It is given to her to see the vision of the green tree and the dry, and by her devoutness and faith, her unflinching allegiance to holiness, and her loving service in home and hospital, and school and street, to redeem the cities from their sin, and turn the thoughts of men to God. And as we call the roll of the saints in the dark days of the world's progress—in the years in which the tide of evil seemed about to engulf all faith and purity—conspicuous among them in the history of every nation and of every city are the women who have dried their tears for Jesus, that they might obey His message, and in the hour of patient service, or the act of heroic martyrdom, witness to His truth and manifest His grace. When the woman's heart has risen in the strength of its pity for the slave, and its compassion for the oppressed; when it has spent its energies in the care of the sick, and the nurture of the children in the faith of God; when it has had words of hope and deeds of help for the outcast and fallen; when it sent the surge of its own hunger for righteousness and mercy through a whole nation, until its rulers were compelled to hear; then again has womanhood stood by the way of the cross, and heard the message of Jesus, and gone down to her task of fulfilling it. Blessed is that city whose women have heard the message of Jesus, who have gone forth to teach its rulers righteousness, its people purity, and its children faith. Five such righteous women shall save a city. They are the true daughters of Jerusalem, who shall at last, without tears, behold the face of its King.

XIII.—THE JOY OF THE WAY TO CALVARY

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"But Jesus turning unto them, said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for Me."—LUKE xxiii. 28.

THE way from Pilate's judgment-seat to Calvary has been called the *via dolorosa*—the way of pain. If by that is meant that it was a way whose every step might well evoke our tears, whose simple record should renew and deepen our sorrow, the name is appropriate enough. But if the name be used to express the mind of Jesus, if it be His sorrow we have in view, its insight is at fault, and its use bestows no honour on Jesus. It is due to the Romish taint which has infected our thinking, and fastened our eyes on the physical sufferings of the cross, forgetful of what the reticence of the Gospels and the express triumph of the Epistles might have taught us—the radiant victory of the spirit over the flesh.

Jesus has been called the Man of Sorrows—outside the New Testament. The nearest approach in the Gospels to that misleading name is the mention of the ignorant and mistaken conception that He was the prophet Jeremiah, a misconception Jesus at once brushes aside. The truth is that, in most of its aspects, Jesus lived a singularly joyous life. The most careless reader cannot escape feeling the calm and serenity of His words, and the perfect peace which pervades His life. Content may express

the high attainment of Paul, but it is too mean a word to apply to the life of Jesus. Calm was not life's crown with Him. He had abounding joys. The silence that dwells among the lonely hills, the shadows on the Lake of Galilee, the array of the lilies, the glory of the grass of the field spoke to Him with a voice which no poet's ear ever heard. His delights were with the sons of men, and He found tender solace in their homes, and uplifting gladness in their love. When we think of His Incarnation, a shadow falls upon our spirits as its humiliation forces itself upon us, but we forget the eager will behind it, which made its narrow limits a constant joy. His youth in Nazareth, with His dawning consciousness of His mission, was a time of the leaping pulse and eager desire. His poverty—of which we, in our ignorance of an Eastern life, and our gluttony for ignoble comfort, have made too much—gave Him an unburdened life. "A man's life," He said, "consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." "Take no thought for the morrow." Ah! when we understand the sources of joy, when we penetrate the secret of Jesus, we realise that, despite His loneliness and separateness in His higher experiences, despite the burden of men's sins and sorrows, and despite the last awful hour on the cross, no human heart ever thrilled with a joy to match that of Jesus. And when we regard Him closely as He passes up to Calvary, we find that from the depths of His joy a stream is flowing which cannot be quenched. Then we understand why He could say to His disciples, as He stood on the threshold of the agony of Gethsemane, and felt the very shadow of the cross: "These things have I spoken unto you that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."

Look at Jesus now, as He walks the way to Calvary! The night—that searching and disciplining night, for all who waked through its eventful hours—had passed away. Its festal joy and discerning love had found relief in the high priest's prayer after the supper. Its sleepless envy and craven fear have issued in the pitiless deeds of the courtyard and judgment-seat. The morning has ushered in the great day. Flesh and heart have fainted and failed. Simon bears His cross, and now He is going forward to the last deed of all. A high elation is on His spirit, and a rush and surge of joyous feeling, over-mastering pain and quenching sorrow, swells in His heart. The wail of the women of Jerusalem breaks on His ear. He stops and turns, and because He will not have them misunderstand Him, and give a false accompaniment to His crowning act. He chides them for their tears. The joys of sense have been taken from Him. Of all the joys that man can take away, He has been bereaved. But He has the joys of the Spirit. He has His deep delight in spiritual things. And it was that inner, spiritual, eternal joy, welling up out of His victorious spirit, which sustained Him, and made the way to Calvary an uplifting triumph.

Let us think about this joy of Jesus on the way to Calvary. Let us, under God's spirit, be guided into its knowledge and possession. Let me offer you some analyses of its sources, for as Christ entered into His, so must we enter into ours.

I.

The first source of Christ's joy lay *in His sinlessness.* The great deep of the Old Testament Scripture is the judgments of God. His laws and ordinances are the marvel of the

mind and heart. But the great deep of the New Testament is the sinlessness of Jesus. For all these centuries men have been plumbing it with the sounding lead of their speculation, and they have failed to fathom it. His words and deeds have been examined, tested, compared, and their spotless moral beauty has been made the more clear. 'Which man convicteth Me of sin?" is the unanswered challenge of Christ. To-day He stands unique; the one moral phenomenon, the one virgin life lived among men. When we contemplate the sinlessness of Jesus, it is as if we were looking up into the infinite azure—the deep fathomless blue of heaven.

Of this joy of sinlessness you and I know nothing. The one fact, common to us all, is that we have sinned. If we had not sinned we might have been away among the woods and hills to-day—not gathered in this house of God for prayer. But we can faintly conceive what it may be by our bitter experience of the lack of it. We have come to the hour of rest with the burden and shame of sin weighing down our hearts. We have awaked in the morning with the gnawing of remorse. We have felt the hot blush at the recollection of iniquities. We know how yet, at times, impulses of rebellion riot within us. And at all these times our joy is quenched. But when we have known ourselves purged from our iniquities, when we have cast out some lurking sin, when we have overcome and have put some temptation under our feet, then we have known the ministry of angels, and we have stood on the margin of Christ's joy. But how meanly do these experiences image Christ's joy in His unspotted righteousness. Think of a conscience which had no accusing voice; of a spirit which had no burden of personal guilt; of a

heart that never hungered after shameful wrong; of an imagination that was never defiled with pictures of hell! Think of a soul that lived in the unclouded sunshine of the presence of God—so that no tears of shame for sin ever stained His cheek, and no broken, penitent prayer was ever on His lips, and try to conceive the deep joy of a sinlessness like that. The happy, laughing innocence of a sunny child, compared to it, is but a world of shadows broken by light. As He goes to His cross, the sense of a life of sinlessness makes sunshine in His heart. As He goes upward to Calvary, the consciousness of a past of which He could say; "I do always those things that please Him," and of a present whose difficult obedience He was fulfilling, is throbbing within Him, and He will not have even woman's tears misinterpret the rapture of His Spirit. "Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness; therefore, God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows."

II.

A second source of Christ's joy was *His unfaltering confidence in God.* When we speak of Christ's confidence or faith in God, we touch a great mystery—a mystery we cannot hope ever to understand. It brings us face to face with the limitations of Christ. There were some things He did not know; they were known only to the Father. There were some things He could not do, because of men's unbelief. There were some things He could not give; they were given only by the Father. When Christ took our flesh, He emptied Himself of His glory and veiled His Godhead. He was made like unto His brethren, and

suffered the limitations of flesh. One great penalty He paid was that He had to live by faith and by prayer. And therefore one chief source of His joy was His unfaltering confidence in God, manifested in communion and maintained by prayer.

Now, it is no easy thing for one encompassed by the flesh to maintain an unfaltering confidence in God. It is no light sorrow for a human heart to lose it. There were times in Christ's life when His faith was strained to the utmost. When He waited in those years of marvellous restraint at Nazareth expecting His call, when He came forth to His own and His own received Him not, when the world's evil broke upon Him in flood, it needed firm faith to uphold Him. And when He found that men were greedy for the bread He made with His hands, but turned from the bread with which He would have nourished their spirits; when He heard their clamour to make Him King, and yet saw the rebellion of their hearts; when He found men going back from Him, and walking no more with Him; when He discerned that one in the midst of His chosen was a conspiring devil against Him, His confidence in God was strained—as the strong cable is strained in the storm—and His joy was shadowed. Recall that hour when the victory of His faith seemed to hang in the balance. He entered the garden of Gethsemane. He knew that all men had forsaken Him. He stood under the shadow of the cross. With trembling hand He took up the cup of the world's iniquity. Then His joy was almost quenched. "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." But the cry of a consecrating faith is on His lips: "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." And then He

comes forth, radiant with the victory of faith, and says: "Sleep on now, and take your rest; behold the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners." His joy has been restored through His unfaltering confidence in God.

Through all His life this firm faith upbore Him, and yielded the deep joy of His heart. His back was sometimes at the wall, and round Him pressed the serried ranks of His enemies, yet He never quailed. He stood by the whirlpool of the world's excitement with undizzied brain. He could look on all the kingdoms of the world, and still resist their charm, and keep a deeper joy than they could give Him. He maintained His confidence in God. But in one last experience His confidence did falter, and then His joy was eclipsed. For one moment the purpose of God was clouded. His sense of the presence of God was gone, and the face of God was hidden. That experience comes like a flash of light to show us a depth otherwise hidden from us. It was in that moment, when darkness rested on the cross, when the burden of the guilt of men lay upon Him, and the sense of His own loneliness was complete. Then His confidence in God faltered, and His joy was gone. Then, but only then, women might have wept over Jesus. It is a woman's voice which cries with an interpreting pathos:—

> "Yea, once, Immanuel's orphaned cry His universe hath shaken,
> It went up single, echoless, 'My God, I am forsaken.'
> It went up from the Holy's lips, amid His lost creation,
> That, of the lost, no son should use those words of desolation."

But now, as He walks in the way to Calvary, as He looks back on all the way God has led Him, as He

sees in clearest light the will of God, and presses on to do it, as He goes forward, the trembling of His out-worn frame has left Him in the high and holy delight of His perfect confidence in God, and so He cries, "Weep not for Me."

III.

A third source of Christ's joy lay *in His service and sacrifice.* The joy of service, and of service which reaches to sacrifice, is a great common-place. Yet how few of us believe it in our heart of hearts. The whole course of the conduct of men declares that it is when a man sits in state while other men serve him, when he receives abundant adulation, when he sucks the world's orange, then his joy is full. Experience will not teach us the folly of it. The plainest evidence will not change this fleshly faith. Yet the truth is this — that it is in the hour of consecration to holy service, in the days of heroic self-denial, in the doing of the deed in which life itself is laid down, we experience that joy to which all others are but as poppies spread. The soldiers who made the wild charge, and galloped into the jaws of death, had a deep joy in their obedience, such as they never know in the shelter of the bivouac. The man who has climbed the steep of a lonely sacrifice has an exquisite joy no words can express. There is one relationship in life which, as all of you can understand, calls supremely for service and sacrifice. That is motherhood. No one can compute the cost of the days and nights of waiting and watching, and the years of sacrifice a mother gives. But who will compute her joy in it all? And when

Jesus will tell His disciples how their service and sacrifice, wrought out in sorrow, will yield them joy, He has no higher image than the mother's joy in her sacrifice for her child. "A woman, when she is in travail, hath sorrow, because her hour is come, but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more her anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world." Has not your own experience brought this home to you? When you have accepted the burdens of your home; when you have gone down to the help of the needy, the sick, the poor, and the dying; when you made that sacrifice that left its mark on all your life, you found a well-spring of joy, which has been a solace for almost every sorrow.

Think, then, what must have been Christ's joy in His holy service, in His great sacrifice. The joys of heaven did not so dilate His heart as the joy of the hour of His leaving them behind. The singing of the angels was only the sign of the joy of His spirit. And in every hour of His consecration, in every deed by which He made the children glad, or wiped away the tears of those who mourned, or healed the sick who were brought to Him, in every step forward towards His goal, He entered into His deep delight in spiritual things. And so, if you can realise it, this joy in His service and sacrifice was consummated on the way to Calvary. In one aspect, the day of the cross is the darkest, saddest, most tragic in the world's history. Yet it was the day of Christ's highest joy. As He goes up the way of weeping, spent, forsaken, marked for death, these women of Jerusalem wailed and lamented Him. He turns and looks upon them, and the triumph-song breaks from His lips, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not

for Me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children." For He was going to the deed which crowned His life, He was accomplishing the purpose of His heart, He was on the threshold of His highest service and sacrifice, and His joy was almost full. Ah, brethren, if you have ever felt the deep joy of making some poor wasted heart glad, if you have known the leaping of the spirit when some abandoned life has been saved from shame, if you have known even the thrill of blessedness when you have led some little child to Christ, you can realise what must have been the spiritual delight of the Son of God in that day of service and of sacrifice when He died to set His people free.

IV.

The fourth source of Christ's joy, I suggest, was His *deep delight in the spiritual attainments of men.* I venture to call this joy in the holiness and sanctification of men the highest of all, because it is the most spiritual and the most enduring. It is the joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repenteth. All great and Godlike souls have found this supreme joy in the spiritual well-being of others. It is Moses who prays that his name shall be blotted out of God's Book, rather than that His people Israel shall be cast away. It is Jonathan, that most captivating saint of the Old Testament, who can find his noblest joy in strengthening David's hand in God. It is Paul—great Paul—who cries: "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved." "I could wish myself accursed from Christ, for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." The man among us who has his deepest delight in the spiritual

attainment of men, has pierced the secret of Jesus, will find a tireless energy in His service, can catch the throb of the holy passion in the words of Christ: "These things have I spoken unto you that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy may be full," and can understand the elation of His spirit as He goes onward to His cross.

There is an incident in the life of Jesus that shows Him to us discriminating between the different joys that are possible to believing men. When the disciples returned from their tour in Galilee, they came to Him with joy, exclaiming that even the devils were subject to them. And Christ rejoiced with them. Yet, because He knew the subtle danger of all such striking and sensational spiritual work, He said: "Notwithstanding, in this rejoice not that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven." And then we read: "In that hour Jesus Himself rejoiced in spirit, and said: "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." There is thus the joy in the triumph of spiritual work, and the joy in the assurance of the mercy of God, and the joy in the knowledge of the spiritual attainments of men, and this joy is highest of all.

This was the joy that made the bright days of His life. The pity of it is that He passed so many wintry days—that so often He would have blessed men, but they would not. When the rich young ruler went away sorrowful, he left a still more sorrowful heart behind him. When He beheld the city that did not know the day of its visitation, He wept over it. When Judas went out, and it was night, and shut the door of mercy upon himself,

he shadowed Christ's longing heart. But Jesus had hours of joy. When Andrew and John sought Him, and sat all night at His feet; when Matthew left his custom-box to follow Him; when Zaccheus's long bound heart burst within him Jesus entered into His joy. When the woman of Samaria stood by the well, and drank of the water of life, until new penitence and new hope were springing up within her, He had meat to eat that the world knew not of. When the woman who was a sinner came behind and kissed His feet, and wiped them with her hair, Simon's bread lay untasted on the table. And when Mary's anointing oil was poured upon Him, His joy was almost full—for He saw within a woman's soul the beauty of His own grace reflected—He saw the will of God done on earth as it is done in heaven. And now, as He sees the beams which shall make His cross, as He is fulfilling the eternal sacrifice, as He, unloosing the bonds of sin, as He, opening the kingdom of heaven, as He is within a few hours of the moment when He shall cry, "It is finished," and go home to wait for His reward, His joy is greater than human heart can conceive. What word could have been more fitly upon His lips to these compassionate daughters of Jerusalem, what word is to be spoken yet to men among us who dwell overmuch on the sorrows of the way, but "Weep not for Me."

This joy is still the joy of Jesus. The joy in His sinlessness ceased when He put off the body of His humiliation. The joy in His confidence in God is less now, when He sits at God's right hand. The joy in His service and sacrifice were consummated on the cross. But the joy in the spiritual well-being of men still throbs in the human heart that beats on the throne of God.

He still "sees of the travail of His soul, and is satisfied." Not only when He saw Peter's impulsive soul chastened into steadfast strength; not only when He saw John's fiery heart glowing with love; not only when He saw Thomas's doubting spirit strengthened in faith; but now—to-day—when He sees our faces turned towards Him, when He sees us laying aside all malice, and all guilt, and all hypocrisies, and envies and evil speaking; when He sees us overcoming by faith, this joy fills His spirit. This is "the joy set before Him," for which He endured the cross and despised the shame, the joy which shall be fulfilled, "when all the ransomed Church of God is saved to sin no more."

As we thus think of the joy of Christ, we are surely in a strait betwixt adoring gratitude and love, and self-abasing penitence and shame. For Christ's life is a great search-light that searches all who come near it. Is there one here to-day who will not confess that he has been repairing to streams of false delight, that he has drunk of poor, mean, debasing pleasures, that he has wilfully missed the highest joy possible to the human soul? Christ does not forbid our little human joys, so long as they are pure and innocent. He does not frown on the joys of home and friendship and love. He does not debar from the glad enjoyment of the world of beauty His fingers have framed. The kingdoms of this world are to become the kingdoms of our God and His Christ. Art, music, literature, science, all shall be His. He consecrates, He purifies, He ennobles all the pure joys of earth. But He continually tells us that these are not the highest possible to the spirit of a man. He tells us that these are the joys which may be taken away, as they were taken away from Him. The

highest joy—the joy He would have remain in you—is this deep delight in spiritual things which throbbed in His heart on the way to Calvary.

Into that joy we enter as He entered. We cannot have the joy of sinlessness. But we can possess that joy which, for guilty, sin-stained men, corresponds to it—the joy of pardon, of peace with God, of complete surrender to His will. We can have the joy of unfaltering confidence in God maintained by unbroken communion. We can have the joy of service and sacrifice. The world around us is stretching out its withered hands to be healed, its empty hearts to be filled. And we can have that purest, holiest joy, into which no subtle selfishness enters, in the spiritual well-being of men. These made the joy of the way to Calvary. As we enter into this joy of Jesus we shall find it quenching all desire for base and degrading pleasures, fitting us for our solemn hours of trial, satisfying our spirits in the years when all other delights may pall, and preparing us for that hour of awakening in His presence. It is a blessing which maketh rich and addeth no sorrow, a pool of healing whose waters are never still, an earnest of the pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore.

XIV.—THE INSCRIPTION ON THE CROSS

XIV.

THE INSCRIPTION ON THE CROSS.

"And Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross. And the writing was, Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews."—JOHN xix. 19.

WHEN a criminal, condemned under Roman law, was led out to the place of his crucifixion, a herald went before him carrying a whitened board on which were written his name and his crime. When the man was nailed to his cross, and before it was raised and set in its socket, this board with its record of shame was fixed over his head. And so Pilate wrote the title, which was the superscription over the cross, "Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews."

Pilate had good warrant for the words of this inscription. "Jesus of Nazareth," that was the name by which Christ was known. "The king of the Jews," that was the charge on which He was condemned. And yet Pilate wrote this title when he was galled and sullen with anger because he had been frustrated and coerced. He meant his words to be a taunting insult to the Jewish people. He knew that the chief priests would wince under their lash as they read them over Christ's head. To their protest he replies in his abrupt and haughty words, "What I have written I have written." He has given his verdict, and that verdict must stand. Pilate wrote and spoke more wisely than he

knew. His title was an unconscious prophecy. Into its single sentence he condensed the consummating claim of Christ. By his refusal to alter it he uttered not only a deep religious truth, but he forecasted the verdict of humanity.

Let us read this inscription in the light of its setting. I take three points. First, the consummating claim of Christ. Secondly, the proofs of that claim. And thirdly, the unalterable verdict which each man must pass upon it.

I.

First, *the consummating claim of Christ.* Every reader of the New Testament is familiar with the claims made by Jesus. He claimed, to begin with, to be the final moral authority of the race. When He stood up in the synagogues, when He gathered his disciples around Him, when He spoke at men's tables or to the multitudes by the seashore or in the temple, He claimed to make the final and absolute revelation of the things of God. "We know," said Nicodemus, "that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that thou doest unless God be with him." The Jewish rabbi was only summing up the impression Christ had already made upon his time. He swept away all previous teaching which He could not approve with his "Verily, verily, I say unto you." When men came with the questions of the soul which had been the mystery and pain of human minds for centuries, Jesus sat down with them as a scholar would with a child, and in a word He made all things clear. Nor was He content to be a teacher, a mere sower of the seed of the Word. He exacted a close personal loyalty and a rigorous

obedience. No one ever claimed such a complete masterhood over men as Jesus. "Follow Me," is his first and his last command. "Except a man forsake all that he hath" Christ will not enrol him in his company. "One is your master, even Christ," is the unexpressed affirmation behind every command. To his people still, for all questions of faith and conduct, all duty towards God and man, all problems of life and of love, Christ remains the supreme and imperative moral authority.

A second claim Jesus made was to a perfect holiness. This claim very naturally was seldom openly on his lips. Only once, when slander was busy with his life and depreciation was quick with its scorn, did He put the question, "Which man of you convicteth Me of sin?" But the claim of sinlessness shines in a sublime vividness in every word and act throughout the whole fabric of his life. It is the one truth to which the disciples cling without even thinking it worth while to defend it. There is one sign of it which is deeply significant. Jesus never prayed with his disciples. The prayers which suit the lips scabbed with iniquity did not suit the needs of Jesus. "After this manner pray *ye*," said Jesus to his disciples: "Our Father which art in heaven—forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." Jesus did not need to pray for the forgiveness of sins. He walked from his cradle in stainless moral beauty, among the daisies and lilies of Nazareth, in the narrow ways of Capernaum, and through the crowded streets of Jerusalem, until He walked up the way of his cross, able to say, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do." "I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in his love."

A third claim of Jesus is to be the judge of all men. It

is one of the slightly noticed marvels of Christ's life that all who stand in his presence find themselves judged. Men came to Him with condescension. They assailed Him with criticism. They looked upon Him with eyes of arrogance. Before the interview was over, they were driven to self-defence, or escaping from his presence with accusing consciences. The tax-gatherer cries out in confession and in promise of amendment when Christ's eyes look upon his dishonest wealth. Pharisees slink out of the range of his eyes as He looks round about in moral indignation. Pilate finds himself at Christ's bar. The disciples cannot face Him with any proud ambition, or in any sulky mood, but the thoughts of their hearts are revealed, and themselves condemned. What He claimed in parable and in prophecy, what men felt instinctively when He was on earth, as we all feel it now, was what Paul declared in his solemn words, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ."

But Christ's consummating claim is to be a king. Jesus might have been the last and greatest prophet of God, the supreme authority of the conscience, the wearer of a stainless moral beauty, and even the instant and final judge of humanity, and yet He would not have been enthroned as a king. As a matter of simple fact, Christ did not achieve his kinghood until He hung where Pilate nailed Him and set his title over his head on the cross. It is the cross of Christ which is his throne. It was because He hung upon the cross that his followers went out into all the lands where Cæsar's name was known speaking of "Another king, one Jesus." This claim of kinghood was long kept as the secret of his heart, but it was always trembling on his lips. It became clear and appealing in his parables. At the close of his ministry

it absorbed his mind, and in the day of the cross all else had shrunk into a comparative significance. The claim up to which the whole passion of Christ's purpose rises is to be the Messiah of the people of God, the king of a kingdom, spiritual, universal, eternal. That was the claim Pilate inscribed over the cross, "Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews."

II.

In the second place, *the proof of this claim.* The first line of proof must lie within the Gospels. The chief priests sum up the Gospel evidence when they tell Pilate, "He said, He was the king of the Jews." Yet there are some who read the Gospels and see Jesus the mystic, and Jesus the prophet, Jesus the reformer, and Jesus the Son of Man, but not Jesus the king. When we look at the story, the truth, wholly independent of single words and sentences, and as the broad effect of the whole, is that Jesus knew Himself to be the king for whom the devout hearts of Israel had waited. No subject leads us into deeper mysteries than that of the awaking of Christ's Messianic consciousness. It is precisely that awaking which is marked in the Gospel with a solemn and deeply felt awe. The enlargement of Christ's consciousness makes what Coleridge would have called "the landing places" of his experience. We see Him in the Temple becoming conscious that He must be about his Father's business. We mark Him attaining clearer light as He consecrates Himself at his baptism and as He passes immediately into the perfecting discipline of his temptation. We see Him again on the Mount of Transfiguration accepting his

crown of death. We are asked to note the trouble and the elation of his soul when the Greeks come knocking prematurely at his heart, and telling Him that his hour was come. We see Him at the last, when He no longer finds any need of withholding his secret, entering Jerusalem in the state and with the honour of a king. And we mark that this claim of his kinghood so absorbs and inspires his people that every other grace and power sinks into the shadow. His words they seldom quote. His moral authority is rarely mentioned. His sinlessness is accepted almost in silence. His transcendent office as judge is appealed to chiefly to comfort his persecuted with the certainty that righteousness shall prevail. But this is what they read in the Gospels, with a constant joy, that Christ is on the throne, that his kingdom shall be over all, and that He shall reign for ever and ever.

This first line of proof broadens out to a second which may have a more convincing appeal for some minds. That proof is the history of Christendom and the increasing dominion of its Christ. Who is king to-day? Enter any picture gallery and you will find that the face which hangs on every wall is the face of Him in whom the excellency of the knowledge of the glory of God has been revealed. Go to any solemn music, and the deeds which are set to the noblest melodies are the deeds of the king Jesus. Take up the masters of literature. Whose life are they striving to interpret, whose teaching do they enforce, whose words yield them their freshest thought? They are the life and the teaching and the words of Jesus. The one personality to-day who does not abide the question of the philosopher is that of this king. Charles Lamb set the truth in his own

quaint and tender way, when he said that if Shakespeare entered the room we should all rise and bow, but if Jesus came in we should all kneel.

Or look at this proof in another way. Pilate and the chief priests believed that a few lines in the records of an obscure province of the Roman Empire would tell the whole story of a simple Jewish dreamer who was crucified and was buried in Jerusalem. Before two centuries had passed that simple dreamer was the only king of the Jews that the world cared to remember, and his hand was shaking the imperial throne to its fall. Since that day every Empire which has opposed his kingdom has perished. The kings and rulers of the predominant peoples of the earth to-day claim to rule only in his name and by his grace. Wars have been fought simply to keep the spot on which He died from the defilement of alien feet. No king dare make a claim, or aggrandise his nation, without at least pretending that he has the sanction of Christ. Were a new commandment of his to be discovered by the men who are digging in the dust heaps of Egypt, the whole world would stand still to listen, and millions would be swift to obey. History will not allow us to make any mistake about the consummating claim of Christ. To history Jesus is the king.

There is a third line of proof which I do no more than mention. That is the personal devotion of his subjects. The imagination falters when it attempts in a backward glance to call up the millions who have lived and died for Jesus. The unquestioned heroes of humanity are the saints and martyrs of Christ. Their names shine like the stars of the firmament. Their sainthood at its best and highest has the wisdom and sanity and joy and

the splendour of sacrifice which only the devotion to their king can give. Still more moving to my mind are the records of those humble, obscure, and nameless men and women who have wrought righteousness and subdued kingdoms of evil within and without, who have gone forth to proclaim his cross and to call men to his feet, with no motive but his command, and no reward but his approval. That long line of devout adorers is stretching out still. Year by year young hearts hear his call. They offer themselves to the churches for service where fever claims its heavy toll of strength and life, where loneliness and privation robs them of sweet and tender joys. They serve Him in the foul atmosphere, forbidding squalor, and perilous infection of court and alley and mission hall. They enter his service with exaltation. They rejoice when they bear in their bodies the marks of the Lord Jesus. What do their testimony and devotion prove but this, that Jesus of Nazareth is the king.

III.

In the third place, *there is the unalterable verdict on this claim.* Towards this claim of Jesus there were three attitudes taken up on the day of the Cross. These three attitudes are taken up to-day. Some, like the chief priests, fiercely deny it. You can hear their cries repeated in much of our popular literature. It is keen with confident protest in the pages of the subtle criticism of unbelieving scholarship. It is hoarse with passion in the secular journals of the mob. Again, some like Pilate disregard it. Much that Jesus said and did evokes their sympathy and wins their commendation. But his claim to be the king, with absolute

authority over the lives and destinies of men, they think to be an unreality, and a demand to be ignored. The third attitude is that of those who, like Mary the mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene and John the disciple, read the inscription and bow down in consent. But mark this truth, that whether a man deny it, or disregard it, or consent to it in devotion, he comes to a day and an hour when he finds his verdict unalterable, and he uses the words of Pilate either in pride or in petulance or in adoring gladness, "What I have written I have written."

Now that day and that hour when a man's attitude toward Christ is unalterably fixed is one of the most momentous in a human life. It may come very early in our youth, as in the case of such as are of the kingdom of heaven. It may come very late, and as the climax of a long career, as it came to the thief who died in penitence. But the verdict may also be long left open. Yet here lies the peril of this undetermined attitude to Christ. Opportunity after opportunity may present itself. Repentance may struggle to bring forth its fruits. There may be awaking after awaking under the strange movings of God's spirit in the soul. But, at last, in some decisive act, in some word or deed of glory or of shame, in some choice in which a man feels he is moved by a power not himself, the verdict is given, and that verdict is unalterable. It passes in to all the chambers of the soul, and seals them fast, whether it be for evil or for good.

This truth has been set by two masters of the imagination in modern literature in an unforgettable way. When Goethe retold the legend of Faust, the truth which his genius made the climax of his drama was this truth of the unalterable verdict. Faust had made his compact with the

evil one. For four-and-twenty years he had enjoyed all that a wicked heart could desire. But in this heart of Faust, underneath his callous bargaining, there lurks the thought that there may be, and there shall be, some way of escape. As the hours of the last day of his liberty pass, the man is in an agony seeking escape, like a beast caught in a trap. But the tragedy runs to its remorseless close. | Salvation at times seems to be within his reach for a single word. But that word he cannot speak. He had really passed his verdict on truth and purity and honour and the service of God, and that verdict is unalterable. What he had written he had written.

The truth is set with a deeper and wiser psychology and with a tenderer pathos in a later parable. Robert Louis Stevenson, in "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," gives the spiritual law a terrifying reality. Dr. Jekyll has discovered a drug which will transform him into Mr. Hyde. Dr. Jekyll, the large-hearted, gracious-minded, benevolent physician, of genial temper and generous hand, becomes under the influence of the drug the little, ugly, deformed Mr. Hyde, with his murderous hates and passionate vitalities. The error of Dr. Jekyll's thought is that he believes he can pass back from Hyde to Jekyll at his will. The question is undetermined for a brief period. He does pass from Hyde to Jekyll at his desire. But the day comes when Jekyll finds that he has passed his verdict. He slips into Hyde unawares. He awakes to find himself encased in the mean and shrunken and knotted frame of the lower man. Then the day arrives when he becomes Hyde altogether, and never can be Jekyll again. He had passed the verdict which is unalterable. He finds the truth of that dread law of the fixity of solemn and wilful moral decisions.

This truth is one to which we are too apt to shut our eyes. It stands with a terrible clearness on the pages of scripture. Esau finding no place of repentance, though he seeks it carefully with tears; Saul finding that his penitence and his cries lead in no wise back to God, because the spirit of the Lord is departed from him; Jeroboam finding that he has cut himself off from the sanctuary of God; Judas finding that he has gone out into the darkness and will never walk in the light again; men who have been quickened and have sinned wilfully and cannot be renewed again unto repentance and faith, these all tell us that they have passed the unalterable verdict. And from the other side of this great gulf, which these wilful wrongdoers themselves have fixed, there comes the song of those men and women who have also passed their verdict. They have bowed down to the king, and they find their verdict, despite their weakness and their fears, equally unalterable.

What verdict are you passing on Christ? When you continue some habit which He condemns, or choose some way which He forbids, or cherish low, self-indulgent thoughts, you are passing your verdict on the claim of Christ. You are crying, "I have no king but Cæsar." And on the other hand there is a verdict which a man passes when he bows down to Christ's law and accepts his love which is also unalterable. Sin may blot his days. The shame of disloyalties shadow his face. The sorrow of a lessened blessedness may sadden his spirit. Yet he knows of the day and the hour when he passed his verdict, "Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ," and that verdict stands. The double-edged truth is set in that dread sentence of the book of Revelation, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be

righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still." There is a solemn silence when a final verdict is pronounced in the hearing of men. There is a more awful silence in the soul when a final verdict is passed on Christ. It is broken always either with the low cry of the lost, or with the song of one who has been set free—for ever.

XV.—THE CUP JESUS WOULD NOT DRINK

XV.

THE CUP JESUS WOULD NOT DRINK.

"They gave Him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when He had tasted thereof, He would not drink."—MATTHEW xxvii. 34.

THIS draught of vinegar mingled with gall, or, as Mark more accurately expresses it, "wine mingled with myrrh," must be distinguished from the sponge filled with vinegar and put upon a reed in the last hour in which Jesus hung upon the cross. This draught was offered to Him as He stood by the cross before He was nailed to it. The spongeful of vinegar was given in response to His cry: "I thirst." The draught was a cup of spiced wine. It contained a drug intended to stupefy. It was the rude chloroform of the day. The other was only a sop to cool the burning fever of His tongue.

There was in Jerusalem a society of benevolent women whom gentle pity moved to a gracious ministry to the outcast, the fallen, and the criminal. It was their custom to provide this draught of wine mingled with myrrh, that the felon on his cross might have the agony and horror of his crucifixion dulled, and his senses deadened while death was making the slow conquest of his life. The cup filled with this spiced and stupefying wine was set down at the foot of the cross. It was placed in the hands of Jesus. He knew its purpose. He recognised the office its kindly donors intended it to fulfil. A thrill of gratitude passed through His

heart. With His perfect courtesy, with a deep regard for so beautiful a deed, He takes the cup in His hands, He lifts it to His lips, and tastes it. But when He had merely tasted it, He set it down again. "He would not *drink*."

Why would not Jesus drink of this cup? He did not usually disregard any gracious service done to Him. He never disdained any ministry of kindness. He did not despise the alleviations of His sorrow which were offered Him. How quick He was to respond to kindness! How open to sympathy! How keenly he felt the discourtesies which He sometimes suffered! When He sat by the well of Samaria, He eagerly sought and gratefully accepted the water from the woman's hand. When hunger pressed Him, He went in with simple gratitude to meat. In the week before the cross, He sought the quiet restfulness and calm of Bethany, that He might be prepared for its ordeal. In the garden of Gethsemane He earnestly entreated the companionship and the solace of men. Nay, when He found Himself fainting under the weight of His cross, He willingly allowed it to be placed on the shoulders of Simon of Cyrene. But now, when He is spent with hours of fasting, when both flesh and heart faint and fail after the ordeal of the night, when He is face to face with the agony of the cross, He refuses the cup offered to Him by kindly hands. *Why?* Because He will not have His senses drugged. He will not have His mind clouded. He will not suffer any unspiritual aid to be given to His resolve. He will be fully master of Himself. He will go through the valley of the shadow of death with every sensibility in keen tension, with every faculty in unclouded clearness, with body, soul, and spirit poured out in the act of dying before God.

Now that incident is wonderfully significant of Jesus. It is full of revelation of His mind and purpose and work. Just as a botanist will tell you from a mere twig the order and the habits of the tree from which it has been broken, or as the anatomist will build up the whole frame of an animal from a single bone, so we can take this little deed of Christ's dying, and learn much of the truth as it is in Jesus.

I.

Mark, in the first place, the *light it casts on the purpose of Jesus' death.* The purpose of Christ's death is a subject of vexing contention for Christian thinkers. Its depths remain unfathomed for many devout souls. Its uses and issues are perplexities for many who love His name. The most unthinking reader can see that it occupied the place of supreme importance to Christ. It was the event towards which He looked; the goal towards which He strained; the hour for whose coming He waited. It was the baptism He was eager to be baptised with, the cup that could not pass from Him. It was the subject of which He spoke with a sense of its mystery and greatness in those few times of holy feeling about His decease, when He craved His disciples to understand Him. As often as the prevision of the cross came in upon Him, His soul was troubled, and in this closing day of His life, His thoughts and desires turn towards it, as the thought of a lover to his beloved, or the desires of a runner to his goal. His very face shines with the foregleams of mingled suffering and triumph when He sets His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem for His dying hour.

If it was the burden of Christ's heart before it was

accomplished, it was the chant of the disciples after Calvary was past. No other subject so possesses, inspires, exalts these apostolic men. One of the wonderful things about the Epistles is their scanty reference to Christ's life and words. We are eager to dwell on that life of loveliness and grace. We are quick to cry: "Back to Christ; back to the Jesus of the Gospel story." We are amazed at the slight mention of that Jesus who walked by the lake, and fed the multitudes. But Paul and Peter and James and John have their hearts more set on the risen Christ, and His coming again. One event is the thing of imperishable memory. One event of the life overshadows all the rest. It is His death and resurrection. With the disciples, as with Christ, His death eclipses all else He said or did.

Why has the death of Jesus this place of pre-eminence? Surely not because it was the final and dramatic seal to a life of righteousness. Surely not because we may thereby be touched and emotionalised into a strenuous morality. Surely not because of its pathos and sorrow, that we might love Him for the dangers He has passed with the love pity deigns to bestow. No; the death of Christ was His supreme work—the work He desired with anguish to accomplish; the work for which He took our flesh and veiled His Godhead. In that dying act He assumed our sins, He bore our guilt, He suffered our penalty, He offered Himself our sacrifice. As He stands beside the cross, He is laying Himself down on the altar of God, and He will do His great deed in the full might of a willing, conscious, unclouded sacrifice. He will not lay down His life with a torpid body, half-dead sensibilities, a dulled mind, a clouded spirit. He will do this great deed, as it required to be done, in full self-consciousness, and thereby make a

perfect sacrifice. He did not come to slip into death, numbed, dormant, dulled in every faculty. "I lay down My life of Myself; no man taketh it from Me." He would not die with any darkness on His memory, or His imagination, or His will. He might have saved Himself the long hours of horror and chill; He might have saved Himself that broken heart; He might have saved Himself the derision and the scorn; He might have saved Himself the sense of being forsaken of God. But these were part of the perfect sacrifice, by which He redeemed His people and set them free. "When He had tasted thereof, He would not drink."

II.

Mark, in the second place, the light this incident casts on *the value of Jesus' dying hour.* Jesus' death has infinite power and value; His dying is stored with treasure also. Let us conceive that Jesus had yielded to this temptation, that, face to face with the agony of the cross, He had drained the cup, and so passed under the influence of that rude chloroform into death. There hangs that figure on the cross, with bent head, with shrunken face, with glazed eyes, with fevered, wandering brain. Listen to the utterance of half-conscious moans in the moments when the pain has been registered in that narcotised brain. Conceive what would have been lost—lost to those men who heard Him pray for His murderers; lost to that centurion, whose soldier's heart was taught how to die; lost to the mother, who looked up into His face, whose submission He would never have seen, whose need He would never have considered; lost to that malefactor, that man of

piercing vision and daring faith, whose face was turned to Him, who passed hand in hand with Him into the kingdom of heaven! Aye, think of a wider area of loss. Seven great words—seven words of love would never have been spoken. Perhaps you have heard it said, as I have, that these seven words on the cross should not be much regarded; that they are but the broken ejaculations of a dying hour, an hour in which mental perplexity and physical pain and spiritual agony confused the senses and almost unhinged the mind. Those who say so have not read the record right; they have lost the key of its interpretation. They have not pondered the "wine mingled with myrrh." Never was Jesus more master of Himself. Never was His consciousness more clear, or His faculties more keen. Jesus hung upon His cross as a monarch might have sat upon his throne—gentle, gracious, majestic. If strong men could hold the recanting hand within the flame until it first died the martyr's death; if men taken from foul prisons could exhort their fellows from the midst of the burning fagots with clear voice and unshaken faith; if tender women could sing psalms while the tide waters rose and quenched their life, shall we deny to the master of self-denial, who had schooled His soul in lonely nights of prayer and patient days of fasting, that power of self-control for which He kept His consciousness unclouded in His dying hour? These seven words of mingled majesty and tenderness and faith are in themselves the proof of the noble self-mastery in which Jesus met His death. All of them would have been lost, all their marvellous exposition of the mind and purpose of Jesus would have been locked within His heart, had He accepted the cup. It was an

act of foresight. He knew the value of His dying hour. "When He had tasted thereof, He would not drink."

The value of Jesus' dying hour is not exhausted when we think of the gracious deeds He did, and the conscious words He spoke, as He met the last enemy. All His people come to their dying hour. All of us shall pass through that last experience. We shall come to that passage of the soul, when we shall breathe our sigh of relief, and say: "It is finished," and pass through the vasty hall of death. Precious in His sight were the deaths of His saints. His horizon was not bounded by the faces of that Jewish mob who watched the end, or by the walls of that city under whose shadow He died. He saw the faces of the men and women who should die in His faith and for His love. He saw Stephen's angelic face, and all the martyrs' upward looks. He saw Paul in his prison, hearing the call of the executioner. And He saw all the pale and wasted faces of humble men and women who should at last—life's long day spent—lie down to fall asleep in Jesus. He would fain teach them and you and me how to die. He would have them die, as He died, with eyes uplifted to God, with unclouded heart, with a great word of Scripture, picked out of the Book of God, on which to stay the soul, and a prayer of blessing for men upon the lips. He would do more than that. He would comfort His people by the knowledge that there was no experience He had not passed through, no travail He had not endured. Think of it. Had Jesus passed into death only half aware of it, with His sensibilities dulled, you and I and all His people might come to an hour, when we would say: "Jesus did not know this agony, He did not understand this awful passing into death." But now

for us and all His people, when they pass through the valley of the shadow of death, this rod and staff of Christ's will comfort them. "We have not an High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but One who was in all points tempted like as we." "It became Him in all to be made like unto His brethren." "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." And to every one of us, as we lie a-dying, there shall come the voice from the other side: "Fear not, I am He that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for ever more." "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." "When He had tasted thereof, He would not drink."

III.

Mark, in the third place, the lights it *casts on the ideal of a Christian life.* Nothing in all Christ's life became Him more than the leaving of it. If the ruling passion be strong in death, the ruling passion of the life of Christ—the very ideal He Himself proclaimed, and would have us follow—shows out in this act of His dying hour. For what is Christ doing here? He is doing what He did in every step which has been disclosed to us. He is doing what He did when He veiled His Godhead, when He went down to the wonderful obedience and long seclusion of Nazareth, when He refused the easy ways of life, when He chose the path of holy self-denial. He is facing the duty which must be done, He is fitting Himself for doing it in a supremely noble way, and He is doing it, cost what it may to body and to soul. And that is the ideal of a Christian life. It is an ideal which hears above any other voice duty's holy inspiration, and goes forward to it

with a passion which is mingled love and joy. When Christ tasted the cup, when He realised that it stood in the way of a perfect fulfilment of obedience and duty, He would not drink.

You will not think that I bring an unjust accusation when I say that we are losing this noble ideal. It has greatly failed to charm the heart and thrill the souls of the young. There is nothing in all the present trend of thought I more lament. We have ceased to realise the moral grandeur and the spiritual exaltation of such an ideal. We have ceased to realise that it is the ideal of Jesus. All the sterner stress of His life has fallen out of view. His great words about self-denial and cross-bearing are emptied of meaning; His hard sayings are discounted; and we do not understand that accent of eager concern He had for the welfare of the soul. We feel that for us to say we "are crucified with Christ," would be to practise cant, and the words are not found upon our lips. I do not say that the Christian ideal is an ascetic one. I do not ask you to think of the Christian life as a cramped, mean, narrow round, with no eye to see things beautiful, and no heart to love them. Every faculty should be sanctified and ennobled by Christ. We are called to a holy liberty, and a glad and sunny innocence. "The Kingdom of God is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost," the three most desirable and most satisfying things in the world. But Jesus insisted that life should first be safe, and then broad, and no liberty was ever given beyond the narrow way of holy and needful self-denial. How easily we fall from Christ's ideal; how contentedly we shut our eyes to its demand. We are all greedy for pleasure; we are eager for ease,

for dainty living, for pretty sights, for ignoble comfort. We are full of zeal to cushion and to pad our lives, so that we may sit soft and live in luxury. It is seen in our spending. We spend lavishly, wastefully, of time and means and strength in the pursuit of things always selfish and often base. It is seen in our choice of literature. There is no book too *risqué* for some, if it will engross an hour and give them a new sensation. It is seen in our habits. We love self-indulgent ways, and we shrink from a single hour of hardship. It is seen in our cowardly refusal to face the disagreeable duties of life, and our failure to do right, whenever right is costly to ourselves.

Ah, brethren, I would that God would give us young men and women who will do right in scorn of consequence; who will face the path of duty stretching out bare, forbidding, cheerless before them, and yet choose it with that noble disdain of hardship, and that exquisite thrill of joy in which the soul lives; who will look out on life as something holy, something to be filled with high triumph over self and sloth, and over the habits that enfeeble the moral fibre of the being; who will dare and do great things for God. Where shall we get this ideal shown to us? How shall we set it as a constant vision before our eyes, and an impelling desire to our hearts? We shall see Jesus standing by the place of His cross. We shall look on Him facing the great duty He might have declined, and we shall see Him courteously putting the cup to His lips, but setting it down at the taste. And with a new ideal fashioning our lives, and a great impulse re-enforcing our wills, we shall refuse to drink the world's myrrh, we shall disdain its soft seductions, but, with a

high elation, we shall live after that holy, unselfish pattern we have been showed in the mount.

IV.

There is one last lesson I teach from this typical deed of Jesus, which may direct and strengthen some who are in special need. All of us come to times of crisis in our lives. We come to the hour when the common round of duty is broken in upon, when "the living to the level of every day's most quiet need," is changed to sleepless strain. We are called upon to make some sacrifice, to choose or to reject some proffered gift, to take a step which determines all our future, or to accept some limiting conditions. Some of you know these hours well. For others they are still to come. These are the hours when the path of your life seems to have lost its continuity. Some call comes which shall alter your life altogether. Some burden is placed upon your shoulders which shall slip from you only at death. Some message is given you which shows you only a chilling prospect in days to come, or points you to a narrowed and straitened life. Some calamity befalls you which breaks the wing of hope. Ah, what will you do then? Mark! you are standing by your cross. You may decline your cross altogether, refuse the call, shirk the opportunity, decline the sacrifice. How many have missed all that makes life worth living, because they have not known the meaning of their hour, and have not seized its blessing. But a still subtler peril—a temptation yielded to every day—is to take up the cup of wine mingled with myrrh; to escape with some

easier, and indulgent fulfilment; to find some ignoble palliative; to drug the soul with some base expedient; to escape from a hard life by a loveless marriage; to accept a duty, and fulfil it with meagre sacrifices; to leave the path of a limiting poverty, under the temptation of an unrighteous reward; to lower the ideal of life because it is difficult in new circumstances; to take up a burden, and, in sour discontent, seek every means of unworthily setting it down—these are ways of drinking the cup of wine mingled with myrrh. As you stand at the foot of your cross, accept it meekly, humbly, and with a holy disdain for all that would unfit you for it, and you shall find it a source of redemption for others, and the very exaltation of yourself. Remember how our great Puritan poet, John Milton, met and accepted his great calamity. He was smitten with blindness when his life was little more than half-spent. What a loss to this man of discerning eye, of deeply interpretative spirit, of noble gifts! Well might he have thought that God had shut him up in prison, and so in sullen despair sunk into apathy, or, in unworthy rebellion, craved some anodyne for his pain. He nobly writes:

> "God doth not need
> Either man's work or his own gifts; who best
> Bear His mild yoke, they serve Him best: His state
> Is kingly; thousands at His bidding speed,
> And post o'er land and ocean without rest;
> They also serve who only stand and wait."

"When He had tasted He would not drink."

XVI.—THE PENITENT MALEFACTOR

XVI.

THE PENITENT MALEFACTOR.

"Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom."—LUKE xxiii. 42.

WE have all been struck with the reticence of the Gospel narratives about merely human and personal details. A name is mentioned, a personality is introduced, a door is opened into the life of some family, but the writer hurries us on without thinking of our aroused curiosity. This niggardliness of reference is not for lack of knowledge, not for the want of care for the things of tender human interest — the loves and friendships, the characters and careers of those so briefly mentioned. It is due to an intense absorption in one supreme interest. It is the spiritual world in which these writers live and move and have their being. It is above all else the things of Jesus. Like one who has fixed an intense gaze on some object, and so loses sight of all beyond a narrow circle, these evangelists focus their eyes on Jesus, and on what He does for the soul.

We need not wonder at the brevity of the reference to the penitent malefactor, although we understand the attempt to lift the veil which enshrouds him. Tradition and legend have been busy with his history. They will trace his life from his birth, tell you his name, and recount the romantic

passages of his past. His conspicuous death, his unique experience, his intellectual strength, his noble self-control in the hour of dying, his chivalrous defence of Christ, his soaring faith, following upon a life of criminal wrong-doing, have made men eager to construct the story of his youth and manhood. But the word of God rebukes by its reticence such vagrant fancies. It sets him here for a few hours in the light and love of the dying Lord. It fastens our eyes, not upon the story of his past, but upon the experience of his soul. The one absorbing thought in the mind of this man who is moved by the Holy Ghost, is to show us a soul passing from darkness into marvellous light, from death unto life, from the power of Satan unto God.

I.

This malefactor belonged to one of the bands of Jewish rebels and marauders who were so common at this time. They all began by cherishing a passionate zeal for Israel's freedom, and they were bound together by a strong oath to break the Roman yoke. But a zeal which is based on hate, and a patriotic fervour which is largely carnal pride, becomes an easy prey to corrupt deeds and baser passions. These bands of Jewish zealots gave way to outrage and lawlessness. Plunder became their trade; murder a mere incident. The strong arm of Roman justice seized them in their fastnesses, and made them suffer the penalty of the cross. Many a Jewish ruffian paid his just debt to that impartial Roman law, cursing his fate and his callous conquerors.

This penitent malefactor was one of two—he must have

been one among a thousand. That law written in the Latin proverb: "*Corruptio optimi est pessima*"—"the corruption of the best is the worst corruption"—is without exception. This man of magnificent mind, of piercing discernment, of keen, incisive speech, of noble courage, of brilliant imagination, had been no laggard in sin. It is when the man who ought to have been a saint prostitutes his spiritual nature to gross and carnal sin that the depths of hell are touched. He came to his cross a reckless, defiant, wasted soul. I once sat among a ship's crew, and one of the company caught my eye. His finely-chiselled face was scarred by bruises, soddened by drunkenness, marked by the coarse and ugly imprint of indulged vices. His eyes were gleaming, partly with the fire of genius, and partly with the blaze of unhallowed thoughts. His speech was keen in its edge, and sure in its stroke. His was the master mind in the company. His references showed him to be a man of excellent education, familiar with the words and customs of godliness. So wanton was he in his conduct, so blasphemous in his wit, so lewd in his allusions, so did he glory in his shame, that my youth was scared and shocked by his defiant wickedness, and I judged him (God forgive every young Pharisee!) a lost soul, I deemed him rotten, ripe for hell. So some Jewish lad looked up at this ruffian's face, and read the superscription over his cross and the catalogue of his crimes, and went from the dreadful scene shuddering at the thought of a lost soul.

But "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." There is a way to heaven from the very gate of hell. There is no soul so sunken in sin and so given over by the shallow heart of man but one glimpse of the mercy of God

may restore him. Listen to the way in which Browning puts this truth, as he tells the story of a man of whom the best despaired, a man whom fox-like cunning and wolf-like ferocity had possessed—

> "For the main criminal I have no hope
> Except in such a suddenness of Fate.
> I stood at Naples once, a night so dark
> I could have scarce conjectured there was earth
> Anywhere, sky or sea, or world at all;
> But the night's black was burst through by a blaze—
> Thunder struck blow on blow, earth groaned and bore,
> Through her whole length of mountains visible;
> There lay the city thick and plain with spires,
> And, like a ghost dis-shrouded, white the sea.
> So may the truth be flashed out by one blow
> And Guido see, one instant, and be saved."
> —("The Ring and the Book," Pope, III. 147.)

That sets this great experience for us. This malefactor saw one instant, and was saved. He hung upon the cross, at first in torpor, for the wine mingled with myrrh had done its stupefying work. But as his awful agony asserted itself, he fixed his eyes upon his fellow-sufferer. He marked His grace. He saw a sight he never saw before. There, in loneliness, hung One on whose face was imprinted the ineffaceable beauty of holiness. There He hung, and heard the taunts and derision of priest and ruler and passer-by, yet He reviled not again. And as he looks, lo! like a soft, sweet music that rises and hushes every coarse and clamouring sound, His voice is heard in prayer: "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." The great, long bound heart of this man stirred within him. Like the Arctic world, after the dreary winter, when the summer sun has come, a new life began to leap within him. You can trace in his words the very birth of his soul.

The first thing to awake within him is the fear of God. The harsh voice of his fellow-malefactor is added to the pitiless sneers of the priests. Quick as a tender heart would parry a blow at a defenceless child, he breaks upon him: "Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?" God and God's justice, and all-avenging law have become realities at the sight of Jesus. Next there awakes his conscience. With softer voice he continues: "We indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds." Ah! brethren, these two eternities of God and conscience cannot be escaped. Sooner or later every man must face them. Some theological teachers have conjectured that a man may so waste his soul, may so habit his nature to sin, may become so fit for hell, may so find it his own place and his proper environment, that he shall accept it with content, if not with delight. It is not so. There is always God and conscience, and every soul here, or, most harrowing thought, hereafter, shall come to that instant when he shall *see*, and the certainty of God and the claim of conscience shall make themselves known. Here they are the harbingers of grace; there the infinite horror of hell. Blessed are all ye to whom, here, on this side of the grave, although it be in the hour and article of death, God and conscience become the great eclipsing realities.

But the life stirring within his soul comes to a higher experience. He sees the holy beauty of Jesus. "This Man hath done nothing amiss," he testifies. The court had condemned Jesus. The high priest had reviled Him. The mob had haled Him to Calvary. His friends had deserted Him. Yet this daring mind, this awakened soul, this man whose witnessing mouth might have been shut by

a rude, Roman blow, will reverse the judgment of them all, and, as though He were clothed in ermine, declares: "This Man hath done nothing amiss." When a man has come to see the holiness of Jesus, he is "not far from the Kingdom." And so I see him turn from his fellow malefactor, lean out towards Jesus, though the blood drops from his pierced hands and feet, and in the most daring and triumphant prayer that ever a sinner offered, render up his soul to Jesus: "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom." Ah! thou first Christian believer, thou mighty Christian thinker, what didst thou see? Thou sawest thy Lord in the victim on the cross, as we have all been trying to do since that day. Thou sawest the Kingdom beyond the cross, which no man then had eyes to see but thee. Thou sawest the true blessedness of man—not a paltry salvation then—not to be taken down from the cross to live the old life, but to keep the company, and to live in the fellowship of Jesus, and to join in the throng, who shall make up the redeemed. Thou sawest the certainty of the life after death, and didst fearlessly face the shadows, sure of light beyond. Thou knewest that where Jesus is, there is heaven. Ah! thou first of all Christian theologians! there is no honour man can pay which can make a crown for thy brow. We may honour and praise Paul, and James, and John and Augustine, and Origen, and Luther and Calvin, and Knox and Chalmers. But which man of these had mind and eyes and heart like this? No man's breath can praise thee. The word of our Lord Himself sets thee in thy place with the high reward. "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise."

II.

Now this story is teeming with spiritual truth bearing directly on the rise and progress of religion in the soul. Let me ask you to think first of *the suddenness of a spiritual change.* This malefactor was led to his cross at some hour before noon. He walked to Golgotha with cursing in his heart, in the defiance of despair, looking out to the darkness of death. He hung upon the cross with the second death—that awful shadow beyond death itself—casting its chill upon him, yet in an instant the great spiritual change passed upon him, and in three hours after he is living in the light of God, with penitent confession, lowly ascription of honour, imploring prayers upon his lips, and the grace of God, like a well of cleansing water springing up in his heart.

You think this is a rare case, a unique experience, a most singular instance of a sudden passing under the power of an endless life. It is not so. The circumstances are certainly unlike those in which any other man can ever be placed, although, indeed, there are more men saved as they hang on some cross, which is the just reward of their deeds, the retribution for their sins, than the world knows of. But as to sudden conversion, let me tell you there is no other kind. The great spiritual change is always the change of a moment. Much thought, much struggle with conviction, much prayer, may precede it. You may not be conscious of it at the moment. Many days may pass before sure evidence has made it plain to men. Many years may pass before you have made it certain to yourself. Have you gone down to the sea-shore

and watched the ebbing tide? You have marked the slowly retreating water leaving behind it the ribbed and sifted sand. But even though you watched it with keenest eyes, you could not tell when it began to turn. Only this you knew, that in a moment of time it had turned, and soon the water, rushing in upon your standing-place, gave you ample proof of it. So it is with the spiritual change in the soul. One man has had the name of God dear to him from his earliest years. He can scarcely remember when the cross of Christ was not standing out before him as the central deed of history. He cannot tell you when he turned to God. Another knows the very hour when his long bound heart burst within him, and he fell, with broken spirit, on his knees in meek acceptance of the forgiveness of God. Another knows the years of deepening conviction, until he was brought to the decision which has shaped his life. That decision hung for months in the balance. Its hour he cannot fix. But in every case, whether it was self-conscious or not, the change in the soul was the change of a moment, or it was no change at all. A change and the consciousness of it are two different experiences.

Ah, that is the moment of destiny! That is the moment when the soul begins to live. Have you passed through it? Have you any doubts? Now, if never before, look on Jesus—look on Him as He hangs on the cross. Lean out to Him, and commit yourself to Him with that noble prayer: "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom," and your faith shall be accounted to you for righteousness. To-day shalt thou also be in Paradise.

Mark, in the second place, *the swiftness of spiritual growth.* This malefactor, as we have seen, was a noble

theologian, the only discerning Christian thinker of his day, a man who knew with more than Peter's knowledge, and saw with more than John's vision. But we can make an even greater claim for him. He was justified by faith alone. He was snatched as a brand from the burning, and yet it can be made clear that in those few hours he hung beside Jesus, he grew into the ripest saint, the man on earth meetest for heaven. For what makes a man a saint? A tender conscience, a deep reverence for God, a devout submission to His will, a heart lifted above the power of the world, scorning its gifts and advantages, a complete dependence on God, a vivid sense of the world unseen, a humble trust in Christ relinquishing all personal merit, a whole-hearted zeal for his honour, and an absorbing craving for his fellowship. These things make a saint wherever they are found, and all these grew to strength and beauty in the soul of this malefactor in that short afternoon, while his life-blood ebbed away.

There may be a like swiftness in your spiritual growth. "Sanctification," says our time-honoured Catechism, "is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and enabled more and more to die unto sin and to live unto righteousness." And a work we all feel it to be. "I've struggled on towards heaven against storm, and wind, and tide," sets forth all our experience. Sometimes we almost lose heart. The conquest in the soul is so slow. The fire of passion dies within us more for want of fuel than because it has been quenched by God's grace. Our blood becomes colder, our eyes grow dim, our relish for some forms of sin declines; we exchange the evil

habits of twenty for the equally evil habits of sixty, a love of the pleasures of gaiety for a love for the pleasures of gain, or of power, or of pre-eminence. But it need not be so. There is not one of you here who might not, if only he would, pass up, and that in a single experience, into a godliness which would rank you with the saints—the excellent that are in the earth, in whom God delights. Have you not had some proof of it? When you stood by your little child's grave, how faith in the unseen, a humble dependence on God, a sure and deeply-lodged vow of consecration were nurtured into a sudden strength! When you passed through the furnace of sorrow, and suffered that sore retribution, whose cause you did not dare to tell your dearest, how real was the mercy of God! How chastened has been your spirit, and how gentle have been your words since that humbling time! When you passed through that night of temptation, and you fought a battle in secret, how near and how dear God was when the morning came! When you went to that memorable religious conference, and gave a whole week to the care of your soul; when you rose at dawn to prayer and went to rest with great words of God making melody in your heart, how you grew into the grace and knowledge of Christ! Your friends marked you thenceforward as a greatly altered, more saintly man. When that fresh spiritual truth seized you, that deep thought about God, that new aspect of Jesus, that new message of the Gospel, when it haunted your mind and became a part of your faith and hope, what a stride forward you took in your pilgrimage! I question if for most men the method of their spiritual growth be not by these swift advances to holiness. The soul has its seasons, its spring and summer,

as well as this sweet green earth. The summer of the soul is the hour we spend, like the malefactor, looking into the face of Jesus, being transformed into the same image. Surely if a coarsened, defiant, sin-burdened malefactor could pass so swiftly into such spiritual beauty, what might not we become? "Yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God," and you shall know, in a blessed experience, the swiftness of a spiritual growth.

But the truth which engrosses all our hearts, as we read this amazing story is that *there is hope for the worst of sinners.* Here is the most unlikely man, under the most unlikely circumstances, saved by the grace of God in Christ. After a youth of waywardness, and a manhood of crime, he is seized and held when on the very edge of his doom.

What a message that fact is to any wasted life here to-night! What a hope is born in a man when he realises that grace has such possibilities! I know that there are men and women who look on the faces of young innocence, and feel a sharpened remorse. They have shut the door which leads to peace behind them long ago. I know that there are men and women who listen to the promises of forgiveness and cleansing, of natures renewed, and of wills made strong for God, with a dumb denial within. Ah, they say, if you knew my youth, if you knew the wild and defiant sin of my manhood, if you knew the dark passages of my life, you would not try to salve me with your appealing Gospel. I know my sin. I know that I have sinned against a grace that was loth to let me go. I feel the retribution of my transgressions in my bones. I feel my impotence for goodness and for God.

The sweet mercies of holiness are for others—not for me. It is not so. To-night I preach Jesus, and I preach Jesus crucified for *you.* I beseech you to look at Him. Look at Him until God and His holiness become clear, until conscience speaks with an imperativeness and a demand you have never yet known. Look at Him as one who knows the worst about you, and died to reconcile you to God, and fling yourself, just as you sit, upon His mercy, and like sweet waters in the bitter sea, new life shall rise within your soul, and, like a holy chant awaking a burdened dreamer from his horror, shall come the words to you: "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise"—the Paradise of the peace and grace of God.

XVII.—THE CROSS AS LOVE'S NECESSITY

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THE CROSS AS LOVE'S NECESSITY.

"He saved others; Himself He cannot save."—MATTHEW xxvii. 42.

THE words from the cross have arrested the attention of believing men in all ages. Great minds have found them stored with doctrine; devout hearts have rekindled their ardour at their flame; dying men have breathed them in their prayers. The expositions of them might form a library. But the words to the cross have suffered neglect. Men have shrunk from even repeating these cries of reviling and derision and blasphemy. Yet they also are full of light. They may serve a special purpose. They may be so arranged as to illustrate the attitudes men take up towards the cross of Jesus to this very day. From the ignorant reviling of the passers-by, who have caught up the charges against Jesus at the trial, to the reverent exclamation of the centurion, and the adoring appeal of the malefactor, we have the full range of the thoughts of men concerning the cross of Jesus. This word of the chief priests and scribes and elders has a bad pre-eminence. It surpasses all others in the keenness of its mockery and the intensity of its virulence. We are shown these men in their hour of

glutted revenge. They are pacing up and down before the cross. They do not look up at Jesus, but speak "among themselves," so that He may hear. The words which their consuming envy fashions express both their argument and their triumph—"He saved others; Himself He cannot save."

This is the bitterest and basest of all their taunts. It is the last in an evil succession. We catch the echoes of the often whispered and murmured taunts levelled at Him throughout His ministry, in such words as "Is not this the carpenter?" "A friend of publicans and sinners." "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." That "He saved others," they now recall. "The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up." They are not unwilling now to remember that ministry of power which had its consummation in the raising of Lazarus. But now when He should put forth His might, now when, if Godhead be His, He should come down from the cross, now when Roman hands compel Him, and iron nails transfix Him, His impotence is plain, His impotence is revealed—"Himself He cannot save."

This taunt, set now in the light of the cross, holds a truth these blind persecutors could not see. We wonder that with the lamb already prepared for sacrifice some glimmer of what they were so unconsciously stating did not dawn upon them. "He saved others; Himself He cannot save," asserts in the concisest terms the necessity of sacrifice in salvation. But it is not the necessity of impotence. It is the necessity of obedience to a law, of the fulfilment of the condition, of the acceptance of a lot. If a man will save others—in any salvation whatso-

ever—the law he must obey, the stern condition he must fulfil, the lot he must accept is that he cannot save himself. When Jesus would consummate this great salvation, there was no other way but to lay down His life on the cross. "Thus it behoved Christ to suffer." "Once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." "He saved others; Himself He cannot save."

It may be an avenue to lead us into the grace and power of the sacrifice of Jesus, and a persuasive to our acceptance of His propitiation, if we can realise how universal, how beneficent, and, in its higher forms, how beautiful is this truth of the necessity of sacrifice in salvation. Let us examine it in the various spheres of its working. Let us see that every gain and every good which has been brought to men—either to individuals or to the race—has been achieved through a corresponding sacrifice. Let us mark that this sacrifice is always proportional—the greater and the more spiritual the good, the greater and the more spiritual its cost. Then we may understand why the redemption of the human soul was wrought only by the sacrifice of the Eternal Son of God.

I.

We need not linger over the marks of this necessity in the world of inanimate nature. Yet it is full of hints and suggestions. The weathering of the rocks to form the mould of the valleys; the falling of the leaves to enrich the soil; the ravishing of the grass of the field by beast and bird proclaim the truth. Jesus summed up the whole of this evidence when He set the law in His perfect figure.

"Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." If it will save others, itself it cannot save. In that slightly higher sphere, where Nature is "red in tooth and claw," where beast preys on beast, and "all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field, the fowls of the air, and the fish of the sea," yield their lives to nourish the lives of men, the law applies itself with a startling and sombre reality.

The truth takes on a happier aspect when we see it in the toil and effort of men. An ethical colour has given it a touch of beauty, yet it is dark and accusing still. No man can escape a sense of shame, or miss the constant pathos of its action here. When we look at the men who have come forth from the mine, begrimed by its defiling dust, poisoned by its foul damp, so often maimed and twisted in body; when we see the toilers who stand beside the furnace, their eyes bleared, their frames racked, and their iron strength broken after a few years of overtasking toil; when we see the crowd issuing from some many-storied factory, where cramping and exhausting labour has whitened their faces and sapped their vigour; when we think of the hundreds of men and women bending over their toilsome tasks in unwholesome atmospheres; when we remember those who watch through weary hours, who fulfil the exacting duties of an unresting civilisation, who come into our homes to toil amid life's drudgeries, or to wait upon our sick, we see the grim necessity of sacrifice. These have their sore travail of body and their sweat of brain that others may be warmed in the dancing firelight; may have their homes furnished with comfort; may wear purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day; may live their days in luxury, and sleep their nights in

peace; may keep their own hands from soiling, and their children's limbs from strain. These save others what they themselves endure. They cannot save themselves. Ah! how the great hearts of men are moved to almost a tumult of pity as they witness the working of this stern law, as they see, with the vision of the seer, its inescapable compulsion and its inexorable pain! Hear Carlyle's prophet-like apostrophe,—"Hardly-entreated Brother! For us with thy back so bent, for us were thy straight limbs and fingers so deformed. Thou wert our conscript, on whom the lot fell, and, fighting our battles, wert so marred." Listen to the brave song of the Baroness Nairne, as she sees in imagination the fishermen facing the billows, looking death closely in the face, and calls up the cost to them and to their wives of the perilous toil that fills the herring creel:—

> "Ye may ca' them vulgar farin'
> Wives and mithers, maist despairin',
> Ca' them lives o' men."

Hear Ruskin's impassioned appeal to the women of England, lest, in their unthinking love of splendour, they should make the cost of their adorning unduly great:—"Yes, if the veil could be lifted not only from your thoughts, but from your human sight, you would see—the angels do see—on those gay white dresses of yours, strange dark spots and crimson patterns that you knew not of—spots of the inextinguishable red that all the seas cannot wash away; yes, and among the pleasant flowers that crown your fair heads and glow on your wreathed hair, you would see that one weed was always twisted which no one thought of—the grass that grows on graves."

Yes, sacrifice for those who have eyes to see, always

crowns with thorns. The cross is bound up with the life of man. And yet, through these very toils and pains, have come the well-being of humanity. There is no liberty which has lifted high the heart of man, and set his energies to the deeds of freedom, no wisdom which has widened his thoughts, no skill which has perfected his dominion, no knowledge which has enriched his mind, no hope which has inspired his spirit, which has not been won by the sore stress and costly sacrifice of those who saved others because they cared not to save themselves.

II.

The truth is plainly universal. It is pathetically true, but it is unlovely. In all the spheres in which we have looked at this necessity of sacrifice in salvation, it has been a stern compulsion. The sacrifice has been made under the lash of hunger. But there is a self-sacrifice which is wholly noble and perfectly beautiful. It must fulfil three conditions: it must be a *willing sacrifice*, it must have a *worthy purpose*, and it must be *impelled by love*.

The first reason why so much of the sacrifice of self is so dark is because it is not done with the *eager consent of the will*. Even in the lower and sterner forms, when circumstance has compelled to some costly toil, if the will be given to it, a certain grace shines in it. But when the will is heartily given, a heroic deed is done. A little child was brought into a London hospital suffering from a most virulent form of diphtheria. It was seen that all hope of saving his life lay in one operation. That was the sucking up, by means of a tube, of the obstruction

in the throat. Although he knew that death was a great probability, the physician, Samuel Rabbeth—young, with a brilliant future opening up before him, willingly stooped over the boy, put the tube in his lips, and sucked out the poisoned pus. He paid the penalty. In a day the fell disease appeared in him; in a week he was dead. This young physician, with all his prospects to tempt him from his heroic deed, yet made the willing sacrifice. We feel the nobility of it. We feel that his name should not be forgotten. But the need has its supreme grace, because it was a willing sacrifice. He saved another; himself he cannot save.

The second condition of a wholly beneficent and commendable sacrifice is that it must have *a worthy purpose.* A sacrifice made for a selfish end evokes no honour. The youth who bends his energies to the amassing of a fortune, or the gaining of a name, may scorn delights and live laborious days, and with an eager will deny himself much he might enjoy. Warren Hastings kept the vow of his early youth, that he would restore the broken fortunes of his family, in a stern self-restraint, an unflagging toil, and a life shut out from ease; but his unworthy purpose corrupted his soul, and his hands were steeped in infamy. Even a father may blemish his sacrifice for his children if his end be merely their material advancement. It is when a high and holy purpose animates the soul that self-sacrifice puts on both strength and beauty. When a nation rises in revulsion at some horrible wrong, as when it rids itself of the blot of slavery by a costly sum, or spends its sons in civil war to wipe out the stain; when a people dares to speak and to act for the oppressed; when a statesman sacrifices his career for the sake of a deep

conviction; when a man gives his life to heal dissension and to lessen disease; when a woman, who might have lived in ease, nurses the sick in the wards of a pauper hospital; when a soldier saves the flag at the cost of his life, or a shipmaster goes calmly down with his vessel while he sees that his passengers and crew are saved, we realise how supremely great and beautiful a thing sacrifice is. We do not for one moment grieve over its necessity. And when a still worthier purpose animates men; when they are moved of the Holy Ghost to save souls; when their hearts beat with desire to redeem man from his bondage to base passion, his bestiality of life, his brutal cruelty, his darkness of mind, his ignorance and crouching fear of God, and they go forth to die under the shadeless trees of Africa, to live among the lepers of Samoa, to have their youth quenched in death by the fevers of the Congo, to toil through long and patient years among the sunken and fallen—then we see sacrifice transfigured, then we cry with an exultant leap in the heart: "He saved others; himself he cannot save."

The third condition of a perfect sacrifice is *love.* It does not seem likely, and cannot be frequent, but it is a possibility that a sacrifice may both be willing and have a noble object, and yet fail in the motive of love. For Paul, the master of experience, contemplates the case when he says: "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned and have not love, I am nothing." Into every sacrifice which has greatness and beauty some love has entered. A deed of self-sacrifice may be costly, it may be heroic, but it will not be one of entrancing beauty, satisfying both mind and heart, unless it be rooted and grounded in love. The

sacrifices which ask no questions, count no cost, seek no personal gain, but give all and lose all—the sacrifice of a father for his children, of a lover for his beloved, of a patriot for his country, of a true disciple for a noble master—are wholly beautiful and entirely blessed, for they are the sacrifices of love. We need only to look at sacrifice as love's necessity in any experience to find how divine it is. When one of our most brilliant and most pathetic of modern story-tellers writes the story of that Frenchwoman who gave up every hope in life, sacrificed her youth, her beauty, her prospects, and immured herself in a lonely cottage in Cornwall, that she might alleviate, by a life-long ministry, the sorrows of her sister, who was a leper, we feel that we desecrate her devotion by asking questions, or by calling her sense of duty to task. Her sacrifice was love's necessity, and life cannot be more nobly spent than in the doing of the deeds to which a pure and holy love compels. She saved another; herself she could not save.

III.

We have climbed to the high tableland of spiritual freedom, and when we look at the cross of Jesus with this transfigured saying in our minds, we are lost in wonder, love, and praise. We see Jesus dying in a perfect willingness. It was not the Roman guard who compelled Him to His cross, and not the driven nails which held Him to its beams. "I lay down My life of Myself; no man taketh it from Me." "The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" "Thus it behoved Christ to suffer." We see Him dying for the

noblest purpose the human mind can conceive. There is really no other purpose great but the redeeming of man, body, soul, and spirit, from the dominion of evil, and the restoring of the image of God upon him. Every pure purpose among men is but its faint reflection; every holy vocation only the fulfilling of its service. And we see Him dying in an almost incredible and quite inexhaustible love—a love which no wrong could change and no sorrow could quench.

The necessity of His sacrifice of Himself for our salvation touches those infinite mysteries which seem to grow darker the more eagerly we look into them. Because they are infinite, because our knowledge of such "heavenly things" must be imperfect and provisional, and because our understanding of spiritual verities is greatly dependent on our personal experience, we should be gentle in our confidence and patient with each other. We can be sure that the same inexorable necessity for sacrifice which prevails in every sphere of effort, the same necessity which ordains that the well-being of men shall come only through the costly sacrifice of its best and noblest, prevails in the highest sphere of all. If God and man are to be reconciled, if the sense of guilt is to be taken from human consciences, if the love of God is to be manifested to man, if man is to see and know that God's love for man and His longing for his holiness are the constant passion of God's heart, if a new conception of holiness, and of service, and of love is to dawn upon men's minds, a new desire to seek after its attainment to be born in their hearts, and a new power to press forward to it to be infused into their wills, the sacrifice of the cross seems to any man to whom God and His law are realities, the supreme necessity. With

any man for whom God and our accountability to Him are meaningless terms, we have no question to consider. This is certain, as not only the New Testament saints, but millions now living do testify, that the sacrifice of Jesus on His cross has done these very things; that for them the necessity has been felt in the hours of their holiest experiences, and the issue of it is, that they have been saved—saved from a dark fear of God, from the awful judgment on their sin, from the power of it and the love of it. That consequent which, by universal testimony, has only one cause, affirms that cause to be its necessity. "He saved others; Himself He cannot save," becomes an anthem for redeemed and adoring men.

This high truth may remain for many greatly dark. Humble souls are saved, put their trust in the mercy of God in Christ, and follow peace and holiness, who could not say one word for the sweet reasonableness and alluring grace of the profound doctrine which holds the truth in its keeping. But for all, whether humbly content with the assurance of salvation, or eager to know the mysteries behind, there is an indispensable experience. That, and that alone illumines. When a human soul passes through that spiritual travail known as conviction of sin (and that may be in his early years, or it may visit him long after manhood has come to him, and very solemn vows have been taken), when God and conscience become the great certainties, when some deed of iniquity stands out in condemning and inexcusable blackness, or his very nature shocks him by its corruption, when shame haunts him by day and unrest vexes him by night, then he will look at the cross, then he will accept the mercy of God, and then he will understand the necessity of sacrifice in salvation—

but not till then. "It is the heart that makes the theologian"; for the simple reason that only the heart, that is, the inner core of a man's being—his desires, aims, impulses, will—is quickened by conviction of sin. For a man who has not felt the shame and the burden of sin, and realised it to be the barrier that keeps him back from God, to see love's necessity in the cross, is as vain as for a childless man to interpret the thoughts of a father, or a deaf man to expound a theory of music. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God."

XVIII.—MARY, THE MOTHER OF JESUS

XVIII.

MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS.

"Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother."—JOHN xix. 25.

THE Virgin Mary has been an almost forbidden theme to Protestant preachers. The other holy women of Scripture may be freely praised. The strong wisdom and resistless energy of Deborah, the quenchless faith of Hannah, the self-forgetting loyalty of Ruth, and the grace of the words and deeds of the women of the Gospels have had countless tributes paid to them. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is an almost unmentioned name. The reason of this reticence is found in the false exaltation, the blasphemous titles, the idolatrous worship given her by the Romish Church. She has been exalted to a pre-eminence over the Lord Himself, and Christian hearts have feared lest any meed of praise given to her should detract from the honour of Jesus. In spite of this ancient and fruitful error, let us accord to Mary her due. Let us consider the surpassing grace of this highly-favoured—this "blessed among women."

It is somewhat to our surprise that we find her standing beside the cross. We had rather expected her to have been in her home in Galilee. But a wise mother's instinct is almost unerring. She has the gift of prophecy. Mary's

full mind, and her quick insight, foresaw the end. When the great wave of popular feeling seemed to be bearing Jesus to a throne, when His disciples were quarrelling about their precedence in His Kingdom, when the streets of Jerusalem were filled with the cries of "Hosanna," Mary's heart was shadowed by apprehension. She was one of the women of Galilee who came up with Him to Jerusalem. She also spent the night of His agony in a sleepless sorrow. She was early at the door of Pilate's Judgment Hall. She mingled with the great company which followed Him in the way. She heard the wailing of the women of Jerusalem, and she saw the nails driven in through His hands and feet. At first she must have stood only on the outskirts of the crowd, but as the sun rose in his heat, the stream of passers-by ceased, the soldiers sat down to cast their dice and while away the hours of waiting, the priests and scribes fell back into the shade, and Mary and the women who comforted her drew near, until they stood "by the cross," and heard with thrilling heart His words of recognition and care.

Had we stood near the cross and looked on Mary of Nazareth, what would she have seemed to be? She is plainly a peasant of Galilee, whose north-country accent bewrays her origin. Her thin, worn hands tell the story of a life of household drudgery. Her dress proclaims the poverty in which she had lived since that day when she made the offering of two young pigeons at the circumcision of her son. Her brow is furrowed, and her hair is white, for the burden of over fifty years is upon her, and the lines of age and care, which come so early and so ungraciously in the East, deepened by the added sorrows of widowhood, are marked upon her face and figure. A

humble country woman whom the passer-by would pity and forget! But what was this peasant woman in her soul? Ah, thought and imagination fail us now! What experiences she had passed through! What psalms had been upon her lips! What prayers had she breathed in her stilled and bewildered hours! What a sacred mystery she had kept hidden in her heart! I sometimes wonder when I see how eagerly, in literature and in art, men pourtray women in all the charm and glow of their wayward youth, or in the beauty and power of their ripened womanhood, that they are not more eager to picture the lovelier graces of a woman's wise and tender and saintly old age. The heat and flush of youth are gone; the interests of life have all been made up; only the most spiritual of hopes can be cherished, but the face is a manuscript illuminated and beautiful through the things done and suffered, and her eyes look out from a heart whose love and devotion are wholly purified. There is no heart so wise and strong and patient as that of an old and saintly woman. Life has left on her only the beautiful.

Although Scripture is greatly silent, we can see how single-minded, how deeply true, how holy Mary was. Her innate modesty keeps her in the background, but now and again the light beats intensely on her. We see her in the hour of the Annunciation, when she accepts the great office that seems to stain the white lily of her chastity. We see her beside the manger-cradle at Bethlehem in her mother's joy. We mark her standing in the Temple, hiding in her pondering heart the prophecies of Simeon and Anna. We are told of her seeking her lost son, sorrowing for Him, and she is shown to us at the marriage in Cana, with her words of delicate consideration. And then, excepting for that silent

appeal of an anxious heart, when she "stands without, desiring to speak with Him," we do not see her again until she is found beside the cross.

I.

Now Mary standing by the cross, patient and resigned, in the unspeakable anguish of her motherhood, is doing the typical deed of her life. No other could so fully have told the story or interpreted the mind of Jesus, yet no syllable, either of appeal or of protest or of sorrow, come from her. And as we think upon her character, it seems to express itself in three dominating traits.

Of these three outstanding features the first is *her inwardness.* It is difficult to express in a single word that quality which penetrates her whole thought and action, but there is no better word for it than inwardness. Her spotless purity to the utmost depths of thought and motive; her lowly, simple ways; her few, soft, appealing words; her gracious considerateness; her marvellous silences; her tenderness of feeling—"a thought ungentle couldna be the thought" of Mary of Nazareth—all indicate the inwardness of her character. When we think of the vanity which might have been bred in her by such a son, the presumption which might have marked her words and deeds, when we realise how impossible to her is any flaunting forwardness, we understand that deep inwardness which kept silent when other women wailed around her, which had no cry even to the cross, which could nourish the sure persuasion that He who reads the hearts of all would discern her sorrow and supply her need.

There is no truly great character, and no devout and

holy spirit (especially among women) without this trait of inwardness — this quality of brooding silence, of reserve which no thought can penetrate, of a certain aloofness and separateness in the deeper experiences. What is its source? It is not a matter of temperament. We must not confound it with an ungracious sullenness, or an impotent silence. The man or woman whose gift of speech is a noble dower may have this quality equally with those to whom reticence is native. The source of a true inwardness is the possession of a secret. Think of the secret Mary kept locked up in her heart. Recall the message of the angel: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." A secret like that shadows a life, and gives a sober cast even to its joy. A secret like that controls every deed and word, gathers to itself all the aspirations of life, and interprets all knowledge of God and every event of His providence. As the boy increased in wisdom and in stature, as His strange and heaven-like ways held her wonder and adoration, as words of prophecy were spoken about Him, the awe of her holy secret, incommunicable to others, fell upon her: "Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." Her life, her purposes, her hopes, her desires grew round her secret as a fruit grows round its core. Mary's spiritual beauty was nourished by the thing hidden in her heart.

Have you a secret? You have—but what is it? The moral quality and blessing of inwardness depends on the quality of the secret. It may be any manner of secret but one, and that is a secret of shame. A hidden evil deed of days gone by, a base unfaithfulness, a broken heart left

behind you in your career, a wrong unrepented of and unatoned for will cast upon your character an inwardness which is cunning, and sullen, and morose. Half the misanthropes among us have unholy secrets. In Hawthorne's "Scarlet Letter" he tells you the desecrating and withering influences of an unhallowed secret. His fine imagination divined that a secret deed of guilt gave a sombre and morbid inwardness to the character of a minister of the Word, set him apart from men, shadowed his thoughts, and had he not disclosed it, would have blasted his soul. But a holy and spiritual secret works out in sweet and wholesome and beneficent words and deeds, in grave restraints, in gentle loving-kindnesses. The man who knows of a day of decision in which he unreservedly surrendered himself to God, who remembers an hour of consecration whose vividness never fades, who has accepted, with unaffected humility, a burden, or a sorrow, or a disability men do not know of, who has struggled with a temptation which almost overcame him, from which he emerged victorious with strong crying and tears—any man who is conscious that "God's Holy Spirit has come upon him, and the power of the Highest has overshadowed him," so that henceforth he knows of an experience he dare not speak of to his dearest, has his secret, and a true inwardness has begun within him. He may mingle with the busy crowds of his fellow-men, take part with eager hope in their schemes and endeavours, toil at his daily task, sit, a cheerful guest, at their feasts, play with the children in their innocent frolic, but within him—an unfading memory, a constant voice, sometimes a tormenting thorn, more often a limiting bond, and as often still a brand upon his soul—there is this secret, which gives the depth to his thought, and

the times of brooding silence and of strong decision to his life. Is there any one of you with vain and frivolous thought lodging within, any one whose talk is only idle chatter, any one to whom the great spiritual verities seem dull and little to be desired, any one who is inconsiderate in conduct, and censorious in judgment, any one who is shallow and trivial? God can deepen you (and in His mercy He most likely will) by giving you a secret. In some gentle way, in some hour of holy feeling, He may make Himself known, and begin to print the marks of inwardness upon you. But if not in such easy mode of blessing, in some sternly awaking hour. He will trouble your life, and give you a secret, which, though it should be an unceasing pain, you will keep as the treasure of your soul. For through it the grace and beauty of inwardness will be formed within and deepened until it transforms you without.

II.

The second notable trait of Mary's character is her *submissiveness.* Art, with its keen eye for a pathetic and typical situation, has often drawn Mary at the foot of the cross, and always in the attitude of perfect submission, not even lifting her eyes. Her sorrow can be matched by that of no other, yet she stands uncomplaining, fulfilling her last obedience, steadfast in her faith. That act of submission was but the summing up of her life, the closing and final expression of that grace which bore the rebuke at the marriage feast without rejoinder, accepted His perplexing words, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business," without further chiding, and first of all, when the secret of the Lord was with her, and He showed her His

covenant, bowed low before the will of God with her meek answer, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy word."

Is it too much to say, that through this grace of submission, so sublimely great in Mary, woman attains her glory? It is not the submission of the slave to the master, or the plaything to the votary of pleasure, or of weakness to brute strength. It is the submission of love and loyalty to the will and purpose of God, and for His great end—the well-being of men. I am well aware, that except in the Romish Church (to its honour be it said), and among many whose judgment is scorned, this trait of womanly character is counted out of date, and even unworthy of womanhood. We hear the insistent voices of those who claim for women a vulgar equality with men; who think the place for the best and noblest women is in the jostling highway; who believe that she will best realise her womanhood, fulfil her mission, and advantage the race if she lays aside this hampering grace of submission. It is true that women have suffered age-long injustices, that there are professions and occupations which have been too long denied to her, that there are duties forbidden to her which are peculiarly woman's, that there are rights of which she has been deprived to the world's loss. It is still more pitifully true that women have suffered unspeakable wrong and nameless dishonour through the vices of men. But with all that may be so urged, a woman's most ennobling equipment, and most subtle and irresistible power for every service, and her completest protection against all wrong is the submission of an unquestioning faith, and of a lowly, unobtrusive, and absorbed obedience to the will of God. The woman who so bears herself finds her true vocation, and is defended

from any assault of overbearing pride or seducing temptations. She will heal and nurse the sick, she will teach and care for the young, she will spend her time and strength in lifting up her fallen sisters, (at this present day, one of the most neglected of duties), she will have quick hands of help for the poor, she will be a counsellor and a minister to the desolate, and above all, what must ever remain for most women the best and most honourable of all vocations, the most desired by the truest and holiest, she will consecrate the joys, transfigure the sorrows, and ennoble the drudgeries and economies of the home. But should she plunge into the unavoidable excitements of civic and political life, or assert an equality in the coarsening competitions of the world's rough business, assume a boldness of attitude and an indelicacy of speech towards the sex questions of modern life, she will lose the true glory, the vast and very real power, and the true blessedness of woman. As Paul, with his piercing penetration, tells us, the glory of the man is not the glory of the woman. And one of the sincerest and most chivalrous, as well as wisest advocates of the honour of women, John Ruskin, sets forth the distinction with his inimitable force and felicity. "The man's power is active, progressive, defensive. He is eminently the doer, the creator, the defender. But the woman is for rule, not for battle, and her intellect is not for invention or creation, not for secret ordering, arrangement, and decision. . . . The man's work for his home is to secure its maintenance, progress, and defence; the woman's to secure its order, comfort, and loveliness." The glory of the woman, as women themselves may yet see, is the higher by far.

There is one woman in this realm whom the whole civilised world holds in almost worshipping reverence,

—the woman whom God has called to the highest responsibility and the most exalted power, Queen Victoria. Her position easily lends itself to an aggressive publicity, a proud arrogance, a bold tilting in the lists of public debate with men. In days to come, when historians write the glorious chronicles of her reign, and seek out the source of that loving obedience, which honours her least wish more loyally than her counsellors' laws, and of that universal sympathy which has made her sorrows a means of sanctifying the nation's spirit, they will find it not in her splendid self-restraint, and statesman-like judgment, not even in her pure and austere morality, but in her sweet, retiring, and singularly silent submission. She has accepted, like Mary of Nazareth, every exacting duty, every heavy responsibility, and every desolating grief, with a perfect submission to the will of God. Oh, women, to whom every pure man wishes to pay reverence, take heed lest in grasping at some glittering reflection, you lose the substance! Take heed lest you deflower your womanhood of its modesty. Take heed lest you mar your own peace and the peace of your true queendom. Mary may not have been the greatest among women, and yet, who will take rank above her? She may not have been the happiest, and yet whose joy will you match with hers? She may not have been the saintliest of women, and yet who ever lived nearer to God or shone in a more spiritual beauty? But she was named, both by the angel and by Elizabeth, "blessed among women," and blessedness, even more than love, is the prize of life. Into her blessedness she entered by this grace of submission.

III.

The third notable trait in Mary's character is her *self-sacrifice.* The sacrifice of the cross is the sacrifice of Jesus. But it was the sacrifice of the Father likewise "who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all." And it was also the sacrifice of Mary, who stood in meek acquiescence to see her Son die. This sacrifice of Mary has been finely conceived by Holman Hunt. He has drawn the carpenter's shop at Nazareth. Jesus stands at His bench with uplifted arms, as though in a moment of aspiration, and Mary stooping behind Him, sees the shadow of His arms cast on a wall before Him. To her foreboding heart, it is the shadow of a cross. It is a fine suggestion of the chilling fear which early possessed her heart, and became a heavier sorrow as He passed onward in His ministry, and now was realised in this dying hour. "A sword shall pierce their own heart also," Simeon had prophesied. Now standing by the cross she felt its sharp thrust, and she bowed her head as she made the mother's last sacrifice. "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord," was the psalm that she chanted in spirit.

What an appeal this sacrifice of the mother of Jesus makes to womanhood, and especially to motherhood! Your sons are in your hands as the potter's clay in his, when you receive them from God. Your words, your deeds, your ways, mould them more than any other influence in life. Mightiest of all in its power over their lives is the spirit which breathes from you. Jesus learned His first lesson on the cross at His mother's knee. It was her self-sacrifice which was His daily book to read the will of God

for Him. What, then, is the ideal your children learn to love from you? What is the design for them which is forming in your heart? As you look on their young faces and think forward into their future, what dream visits you? Is it a dream of a soft and easy life with ignoble comfort and worldly exaltation? How many of you are willing to bring up a son, or a daughter, and in the hour of others' need, meekly surrender them to a cross? Dare any of you, with your little hoard of maxims, preach down your daughter's heart? Alas, I have heard a mother casting ridicule on a son's unworldly ideal. I have known her hold up a forbidding hand when a son turned his face, in the service of God, towards the foreign field. I have known a mother disdain the Christian ministry to her student son, because of its poor earthly rewards. I have known a mother cling with detaining hands to a son, with whom God's spirit was striving, lest in any hour of consecration he should let the zeal of God's house eat him up. How pitiful have been some of the histories of these youths seduced from the paths of sacrifice by the mothers who bore them, into which they were ready to throw all the strength of their nature! Will any of you here, though you know a sword will pierce your heart, count it blessedness to surrender your son to a cross? Surely you can understand the devotion of the Jacobite mother who gave her one son, and would have given ten, to follow Prince Charlie. The woman to be envied in the Gospel is the mother of Zebedee's children, whose vain and selfish prayer was denied to her. The woman to be envied among us is she whose son sleeps in the heart of Africa; or she whose son has despised a base reward; or she whose son has faced and accepted his cross, and found that death met him there.

She also has her Magnificat to sing: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." She has put on the crowning grace of womanly beauty—self-sacrifice.

It is little wonder that men have set Mary on a throne, and placed her at the right hand of God. It was the satisfaction of an ecstatic reverence for spiritual greatness. It was an answer to the cry of the human heart. It was the deification of graces which a strange blindness failed to see in Jesus. For what was but a broken and imperfect beauty in Mary—her inwardness, her submission, her self-sacrifice—are altogether lovely in Jesus. There is no holy thought, no reverencing emotion, no willingness to respond to the appeal of her grace, awakened in any human soul by Mary, which should not be called to strength by the very thought of Jesus. Is there any man here who remembers a wild and wayward life, who recalls deeds of riot and shame, who thinks with self-abasement of his defiling years? Does he remember also his errant boyhood, when he could be sure of a welcome from the mother who bore him, although all others should condemn him, when he knew that she would not be indulgent with him, but would break her heart over his sin, and does he sometimes wish he could believe God to be so merciful? To him this story of the grace of Mary, turned by some into a dishonouring superstition, is only a hint and a suggestion of the perfect truth in Jesus. Mary's grace and Mary's deed will not avail, even though they had reached the perfect fulness of Christ's love and compassion. It is Jesus who says: "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out." The Old Testament prophet could not have dreamed of the perfect fulfilment of His daring word: "Can a mother

forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? She may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold I have graven thee on the palms of My hands." The graving was done, not on the palms of Mary, but on the hands of Jesus—on the cross, both for Mary herself and for all mankind. If any of you in this hour have been moved to holy thought and penitent desire by the grace of Mary, lift up your eyes to Jesus, and the grace of Mary shall be outshone by the grace of Him who loved you and gave Himself for you.

XIX.—THE CONSIDERATENESS OF JESUS

XIX.

THE CONSIDERATENESS OF JESUS.

"When Jesus therefore saw His mother and the disciple standing by whom He loved, He saith unto His mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith He to the disciple, Son, behold thy mother."—JOHN xix. 26, 27.

"LET nothing be done through strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others," said Paul, calling the Philippians to those gracious deeds and gentle courtesies which make the Christian life full of healing and of peace. And in his own great way he carries his counsel up to its holiest expression and strongest sanction when he adds, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." And then with that eagle-like survey of the mysteries of God, his thoughts sweep heaven and earth, and his difficult eloquence sets forth that "mind" which emptied itself of its glory, and became obedient to the death of the cross. We shall not, and we need not always lift our thoughts so high. We, who are looking into the things of the cross shall think of only one passing incident of its obedience. We shall look at Jesus speaking to His mother as He hung a-dying, and we shall learn His considerateness, and love it, and so the mind of Jesus shall also be ours. Let us

look, in the first place, at this grace as it is seen in Jesus; then consider its spheres of exercise; and in the third place, learn its source and secret.

I.

It is neither wise nor true to the spirit of the evangelists to make too much of the physical suffering of the cross. Jesus Himself despised it. But here it adds to the grace and greatness of His deed. He came to Calvary after a night of sleeplessness, following on the agony in the garden, when the sweat stood like drops of blood on His brow. During the long anguish of the morning, He stood for hours with no one to bid Him rest, and He was scourged and crowned with thorns, and smitten by the soldier's rough palms. His limbs refused the weight of the cross on the way. He came to His dying act, with every nerve quivering with exhaustion, and every muscle crying out with pain. He hung upon His cross, with the nails piercing His hands and feet, and He felt the agony of an unappeasable thirst, and that slow chill which told Him that the shadow of death was upon Him. And although it may not so stir our human imagination, still more awful was the travail of His soul. The burden of human sin which He must bear alone, and the felt approach of that tide of forsakenness which swept for a moment between Him and the Father, were agonies which even David's conscience could not have fathomed. Who would have aught but words of praise had He concentrated every thought and word on the great redemption deed? Yet He lifts His eyes to look upon His mother. A flood of recollection, we can

boldly say of Him who took upon Him our nature, passed over Him. The home in Nazareth, in his vision, hid the walls of Jerusalem. The crooning of His mother's voice as she sung her lullaby to Him; the feel and pressure of His mother's arms; the tending of her care as His boyhood grew to strength; the reverent wondering of her mind as He bore more plainly the marks of His divinity, and the piercing of her heart as He strained forward to the cross—all came back to Him. Now also clear before Him rises the picture of her future. The widow's loneliness made more desolate, the whitened hair given another sorrow as it goes down to the grave, age feeling its failing strength, poverty and homelessness stinting her of the sweet comforts of life! He masters His agony, He refuses His groan, and in brief words, never forgotten by two of those who heard them, He said: "Woman, behold thy son." "Son, behold thy mother." The disciple, who understood Jesus best, fulfilled his charge by taking her to his own home. Love needs only a hint.

This is the golden example of the considerateness of Jesus, yet we may take up His life anywhere, and find the grace of it as constant as a rich vein in the quartz. In the first miracle at Cana, He wrought His miracle to save a bride confusion of face on her wedding day, and "He manifested forth His glory." As He walked among the sick and impotent He "marked" them. As He taught His disciples, and they blundered and fell into error, and nursed unspiritual ambitions, He never failed in an often-tried considerateness. Think of that amazing instance in the Garden of Gethsemane. The disciples sleep, in spite of His awakening calls, through the hour of His agony. It

was a failure in sympathy for which an earthly friend would have accepted no excuse, and to which forgiveness would not easily have been given. Jesus felt it keenly, for it robbed Him of a sustaining comfort He had need of. And yet His lips frame their plea for them, "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." How considerate, even in judgment will Jesus be! It will be the condemnation of our own hearts we shall fear in that great day, and not the word of Christ. But surely this act of grace on the cross is the climax of it all. There is no deed more expressive of His self-forgetfulness and of His power to bless. As a drop of dew can image in its clear orb the whole fair world of God, so this single deed images the sacrifice of the cross. He who stooped to heal a mother's sorrow, to comfort her heart with the assurance that she was not forgotten, stooped to heal the sorrows of a universe, and to make it clear to them that they were not forgotten of God.

II.

Every one must feel the charm and power of this grace of considerateness. Every one realises the wideness of its sphere. Of deeds like this our human hearts and lives are in sore and constant need. Life presents more occasions for the exercise of this grace than for deeds of heroic and dramatic self-sacrifice. Who has not felt its blessing? When you were passing through your last deep sorrow, your friend came and sat with you; you marked him choosing acceptable words, you noticed his delicate dealing. He left you, perhaps thinking that he had not helped you by any message, and yet he had poured in healing balm upon your spirit by his considerateness. You may have watched by the bedside

of a sufferer through a long night, and have seen how he endured long hours of thirst, and forbore to ease his pain by any restless movement, affecting to be in peace, that he might not unduly trouble you. He was doing a braver deed than he who, in some moment of surging excitement, wins the Victoria Cross. He was putting on this very grace of Jesus. And you may have seen the children, when some dreary passage fell upon your life, look on you with a silent compassion, and hush their noisy play and put away their games, that they might not jar upon your spirit. "Ah," you whispered, "of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." Men's faces shine like angels' when they do deeds of considerateness.

The spheres in which this grace is most needed are always those in which it seems to be most difficult of exercise. It is easiest in the greater experiences of life, in times of trial and sorrow, in days of sickness, and in the manifest calamities of life. There are many who bestow abounding gifts of mercy then, who let whole days of common life pass without a kindly word. The searching tests of a deep considerateness, a considerateness that costs, are to be found in the rough business, the daily commonplace intercourse, the worries, the vexations, and the petty mortifications of life. There is no sphere in which it plays so large a part as in the family. Considerateness is the angel in the house. How manifold are the sins against it! When a man can find time for his political club, for his public meeting, for his dinner with his friends, for his boon companionship, time even for Christian work, and yet no time to sit quietly beside his wife, or to take his children on his knee and soothe their fretfulnesses, and speak to them of God, he sins against considerateness. When a woman finds

abundant opportunities of seeing the sights of the town, of visiting a wide circle of acquaintances, of playing the part of a Lady Bountiful, of indulging her own personal tastes and studies, and yet keeps a comfortless house, and refuses to spend the patient, unseen, difficult hours of care and teaching and training, which are her children's most blessed discipline, she lacks considerateness. I do not say one word against public service and social duty. There are daughters of Jephthah for whom these are prior to all other calls. There are others who may also find the time and strength for them. But whether these ought to be, or ought not to be done, the others ought not to be left undone. When a son is a fine fellow outside his home, a youth of genial manners, of an infinite wit and a most excellent fancy, but at home consults his own convenience, sits silent and uninterested at meals, has no time he can spend with his sisters, and keeps such hours at night as to make his mother's heart heavy with anxiety, he sins against considerateness. And when daughters indulge their whims, choose their own company, however distasteful to the family, are eager for every occasion of show and prideful display, but scorn the simple services which are a woman's reasonable sacrifice, they lose the mark of this surpassingly beautiful grace. The secret of household peace and joy is considerateness. There would be no feuds in the morning, and no sulky faces at night, no neglected and contemned fathers and mothers, no selfish marriages, and, one may be daring enough to say, no evil succession to the profligate sons of Eli, were each member of a family to be considerate. The servants of the house would understand the Gospel better if it came in this lovely guise. It would ordain the economies, regulate the hours, give tone and accent to the speech,

teach the grace Simon the Pharisee did not wear, and bestow such a charm to the house, that the sojourner for a single night would dream of angels, and say: "Surely God is in this place."

Another important sphere of considerateness, slightly larger and less closely connected, is the Christian Church. By far the most prolific source of congregational animosities is a want of considerateness? I have never known a church quarrel which a thoughtful word spoken in time, or a kindly deed, simply done, would not have healed. Even in the larger area, where denominational convictions and interests and aims tend to come into conflict, the chief need is considerateness. We need not hold our principles less strongly, we need not flinch from the attitude of strong resistance we have taken up against some obvious and galling wrong, but we can gain both respect for our cause and commend ourselves by our considerateness in thought and speech. The healing of our divisions will never begin until this grace is put on, and the men who disdain it and sin against it, however loyal they may be themselves to a church, are disloyal to Christ. We have all marked a want of it in the smaller area of congregational life. When one sees a man sit in his pew so as to take up as much room as possible, and by his very attitude assert his right to it, and marks a poor stranger enter and look about for a place where he may pray with the people of God, and notes that this Christian man's very shoulders square themselves in a cold refusal to give place, how impossible is it for him to expect the presence of Jesus, or to receive the blessing of the Holy Ghost? The peace and fitness for worship of every one who witnesses it are gone. Or how much is he better who

insists on a chief and prominent place, keeps more seats than his family can occupy, and refuses to accommodate his fellow-worshippers? The protracted meeting, the vexing controversy, the division and conflict of opinion, receive all their bitterness from a lack of considerateness. It is not that such peacemakers have maliciously evil hearts; it is not that they are naturally and wilfully unkind and ungenerous. They know how to make gifts which are sacrifices; they can be moved to tears at a recital of woe; they abound in many of the Christian graces. It is the want of considerateness. One greatly considerate man is a gift of God to a church or congregation. He will turn the acids of a meeting into sweetness. He will give the men and women of angular ways an unconscious education in courtesy, for he will continually lead them all right up to the cross.

A third sphere is that of society. Considerateness is the unwritten law of society. All politeness is based upon it, and one of the pleasures of mingling with cultured and refined men and women is that they have learned, outwardly at least, this law. The man who offends against the recognised customs of society becomes impossible. Therefore it is that cutting, sarcastic, sneering, and cynical personalities are forbidden. It may seem vastly clever to say a smart thing; it may be a sweet morsel under the tongue to sum up the opponent in a scoffing epigram; it may be very damaging to make rude and annoying allusions, but society, which knows how to assume the virtues of Jesus, passes such men over, and leaves them out of its roll of honour. Even in worldly society, to humble oneself, to take the lowest room, to speak with gracious deference, to listen to every man's opinion, to condescend

to men of low estate, wins esteem. When these are the outward signs of an inward grace they have an inexpressible charm. Kind thoughts, patient words, gentle deeds, may not seem of great consequence, but they make the world beautiful. They are like the grass of the field of which men take little account, and yet the world would be a desert without its beauty. And of those to whom they have become the habit of their lives it may also be said that "Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."

III.

How shall we win this lovely and most potent grace? It must at once be frankly owned that no one has it by nature. There are some for whom at first sight we may be tempted to claim it as a native endowment, or to think that its attainment was easy for them. We remember David's fine self-abnegation, and John's tender entreaties, and Paul's gracious courtesies. But when we recall Uriah lying all night at David's door, and hear John's words calling down fire from heaven, and see Paul standing at Stephen's death or haling both men and women to prison, we realise that it is no man's heritage at birth. It cannot be taught by rules, not even by the courteous customs of society. Society does not know its secret, however greatly it may covet its charm. Society can cover the selfishness of the human heart with a veneer of etiquette, it can hide the envious or belittling thought under a mask of fair words, but ever and again its hates and vanities and jealousies leap out and set its schooling at naught. Society is quick to pick up the

lady's dainty trifle, but it has no eye for the poor creature, overtasked and drooping under life's heavy burden, no care for the real sorrows of life, and no ear for the groans of the oppressed. If you fall in society it will simply trample you under its feet.

For what is considerateness? What did Jesus do for His mother on the cross? When we answer this we shall know how to attain it. Considerateness is simply thinking with the heart. There are many who think clearly with the head. They can see with a clear, cold, critical eye. They flatter themselves that they can analyse a character and interpret a situation. The result they attain tells us as much as a chemical analysis of the cremated dust would tell us about the man. No, unless you look with sympathetic insight, with reverent regard, with a generous expectancy—unless, in one word, you think with the heart, the truth will be hidden from you, and you will neither be able to speak the word in season nor to do the deed of grace. "Blessed is he that considereth the poor." Mark, "considereth"—not enquireth about, probeth into, even feedeth, clotheth, casteth alms unto, but considereth—thinketh with his heart about the poor. "God will strengthen him upon his bed of languishing." God help not only the poor, but all men, who are left to the tender mercies of the inconsiderate. Their heads may be as clear as a frosty night, but their hearts are as cold.

When Jesus looked on His mother He thought with His heart. And this grace can be learned, not even in the least measure of it, nowhere except at the cross. The man who has only passed by the cross, and in some hour of tender feeling understood and sympathised with this deed of Jesus, cannot fail to acquire a desire after

it, which will be operative in his character. But that will not suffice. One does not become holy by seeing deeds of holiness. Men do not always love the highest when they see it. A man does not become strong in the might of Jesus by an hour of sympathetic appreciation. He may be touched, rebuked, resolved in his mind for a while, but when he goes down to the fierce competitions and passionate rivalries of the world, his impressions will be swept away, as the children's markings on the sand are washed out by the play of the waves. We must do more than see and feel. We must accept the truth as it is in Jesus. We must look up at the cross for our forgiveness and our healing. We must accept that mastership of Him in whom God was reconciled unto us, who loves us in spite of all the evil of our nature, and now reconciles us to God, and as we kneel at the cross in self-surrender, we shall hear and feel the compelling power of the call: "Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you."

The work is not done then. There are some sins—the coarser and more controllable sins—which die in the moment of our acceptance of Christ. No man can scab his lips with oaths after he has sincerely come to Jesus, unless in some sorrowful moment—deeply repented of—under strong provocation, when an old habit receives a sudden revival. No man who has been the prey of fleshly passion can continue in his sin if he has been born again. He must mortify his members which are upon the earth. He must put them to death with a decisive stroke if he is to follow Christ at all. But graces are not put on in a twinkling of an eye, or in

the utterance of a vow. They ripen, Paul tells us, following his Master's teaching, like fruit. We must consider Jesus, if we shall learn to consider men. As we consider "Him, who is the Apostle and High Priest of our profession,"—"Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself," we shall be able to consider one another to provoke unto love and good works. So, looking at Jesus, entering into His school of patience and peace, dwelling on Him by the way of memory and judgment, and estimate and recollection, we shall put on Christ, and walk among men—oh, blessed and coveted consummation!—in the charm and power of considerateness.

XX.—MARY MAGDALENE

XX.

MARY MAGDALENE.

"Now there stood by the cross of Jesus . . . Mary Magdalene,"—
JOHN xix. 25.

OF the three Maries who are outstanding in the Gospel story, the least known and the least regarded is Mary Magdalene. The sense of a dark stain upon her life, and of a shame never to be wholly taken away, oppresses our minds. It has been thought that the silence of the Gospels is the veil of delicacy shrouding her evil career. But when John lifts the veil at the close of his Gospel, and shows us Mary standing by the cross, then watching in a mute despair beside the tomb, and in the morning, in the garden of the resurrection, turning to look with wondering eyes into the face of Jesus, and falling in adoration at His feet, we have our groundless judgment rebuked, and we realise that Mary is the woman of surpassing modesty, of shy and self-humbling diffidence, and of irreproachable purity—the very lily of the Gospels.

I.

Almost all we know of Mary's early life is told us in a single sentence of Luke's Gospel. It was the custom of

devout Jewish women to accompany the rabbi under whose teaching they had been blessed, and to minister to his wants. And so Luke tells us, "The twelve were with Him, and certain women which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary, called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others which ministered unto Him of their substance." This simple mention tells us that Mary belonged to Magdala, one of the thriving towns which then clustered round the Lake of Galilee, and that she was called Magdalene to distinguish her from the many others of the name; that she was of good birth, a Jewish gentlewoman, given precedence here of the wife of Herod's steward; that her time was wholly at her own disposal; and that her substance enabled her to share in that ministry to Jesus, and make provision for the wants of the disciple band, of which they were so often in need. The source of her unwearying devotion to Jesus is mentioned in the fact that "out of her went seven devils." Here is a woman whose spirit had been under the thrall of an evil dominion, whose life had been redeemed from a curse more saddening and more blighting than insanity, but now sweet reason was throbbing in her brain, gentle speech is breathing from her lips, and the beauty of holiness is transfiguring her character, because at the word of Jesus, the indwelling spirits had fled out of her.

Across this simple, natural, and most winsome history tradition has written a legend, very fascinating to morbid and prurient minds, which foully asperses the character of the Magdalene. She has been identified with the woman who was a sinner, who kissed the feet of Jesus, and wiped

her sudden tears with her hair. The name, Magdalene, so dear to the apostolic band, has thereby become a synonym for a woman of shame. There is not a particle of evidence for this dishonouring identification. The story of the woman who was a sinner can be read in the preceding chapter of the same Gospel and there is not a hint that she and Mary are one. The root out of which the baseless legend grew is the suggestion that the "seven devils" may be only another expression for the "many sins" in Luke's pathetic incident. But the seven devils no more implied riotous and wanton conduct then, than *dementia* would now. The simple fact that Mary was permitted to join the devout women who followed Jesus, and is found in the companionship of women of unsullied name and of social honour, is sufficient to refute the assertion. The woman who was a sinner was sent into the obscurity and silence which the Master of all healing knew to be a necessity for her.

It is a practice with some in our day to exhibit great and shameful sinners who have been taken from wallowing in the mire, as special trophies of the grace of God, and to draw crowds to listen to the recital of their profligacies. That is wholly alien to the method of Jesus. He never suffered any flagrant sinner to recount his experiences, to tell the story of his impotence, or to parade his vices. He knew how vulgarising and debasing and defiling such speech is both to speaker and to hearer. There are things of which it is a shame even to speak. The woman who was a sinner passes, with Christ's significant word, "Go in peace," into the refuge and sanctuary of her home, to live her difficult life, without the temptations which would have beset her had she followed Jesus in the

way. The face which Jesus saw in the company of women who ministered to Him was that of Mary Magdalene, with sweet sanctity on her brow, adoring reverence in every word, and deep within her virgin heart the one supreme, absorbing spiritual passion of devotion to Him who had redeemed her life from destruction and crowned her life with His loving-kindnesses and tender mercies.

It was not in the house of Simon the Pharisee that Jesus and Mary sealed their covenant. I could have wished that some Evangelist had told us the story, and will daringly venture to suggest that, after some such fashion as this, Luke might have written the chronicle of grace: "And Jesus entered and passed through Magdala, which is by the Sea of Galilee. And there met Him in the way a certain woman whose name was Mary, possessed with seven devils. And when she saw Jesus the devils tore her, and she cried out in fear. And her father came to Jesus and besought Him to heal her, saying: 'My daughter has been grievously tormented from her youth until now; if Thou canst do anything, have mercy upon us.' And Jesus, moved with compassion, rebuked the devils, and they fled out of her, and she fell at His feet as one that had been dead. And Jesus took her by the hand and said unto her, 'Mary!' and she arose, in her right mind, and went unto her home. This is that Mary Magdalene who ministered unto Jesus."

II.

The ministry that followed such a redemption is precisely what we would expect. The poor mind, so long wracked by demoniacal possession, has no great thoughts

to tell to others. The lips which had been unused to speech have no words to utter. The years of her youth had been lost. She was like one who had been in the desert. Her faculties, so long in prison, were numbed and dormant. But her devotion burst out, like a long pent-up flood, in a stream of beneficence to Jesus. She took of her substance, and, in that high exaltation of spirit that visits only the generous soul, she poured it out without stint. She saw that the bag which Judas bore should not be empty. There was no lack of water for His feet, or bread for His table, or wine for His hours of weakness when Mary's hand could bring them—aye, there was no lack of spices for His tomb when the day of the cross was past. All that reverence and modesty permitted to a Jewish woman she would do to her Rabboni, her Master and Lord, as He went through disdaining cities and churlish villages. And when the clouds of the coming storm began to gather over His head, with that quick insight of love, which saw where disciples were blind, she hurries up to Jerusalem, knowing that love's ministry will find its occasion there. We see her standing by the cross, silent, bewildered, vexed with pain, leaning on Mary's stronger spirit. We see her sitting in the evening beside the tomb with another Mary, that they might bear a message to her who suffered a mother's unspeakable sorrow. We see her after a sleepless night, "when it was yet dark," for both love and sorrow conquer sleep and defy weariness, hastening out to the sepulchre. We hear all the passion of her heart, breaking out in her wail: "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid Him." Then we see her coming to the supreme moment of her ministry, and the crowning glory of her life. We see her turning herself about in that

garden, whose spring beauty seemed to mock the gloomy winter of her heart, and looking on Jesus, almost as distraught by sorrow as she had been by her madness. We hear her repeating her question with an accent of demand, and then at the word, "Mary"—ah, how could she forget her first call—rising to the height of that faith which has elevated and calmed the souls of men. For to Mary Magdalene was given that unmatched honour, that she was the first to look into the face of the risen Son of God, and to speed into a city with the message which still awakes the world. "The Lord is risen!"

III.

Now there are three truths which the purity and ardour of devotion of this lovely life of Mary Magdalene set in clear light. The first is the blessedness of *a life which has nothing to forget.* Mary was not a woman with a past. No one stood by the cross looking up at Jesus who had less self-reproach than she. Her early years had been a blank, and since she had been loosed from her bonds, her whole life had been an unfaltering loyalty to things true and good and beautiful.

Now the blessedness of a life which has nothing to forget seems to be lightly valued in some quarters to-day. There is a tendency, which hectic modern literature and morbid preaching are emphasising, to think that the man or woman who has not had a wild and wayward outburst in the days of youth is a poor, pale-blooded creature. There is a feeling that the man or woman with a dark story behind is more piquant and interesting, and that a youth of blameless innocence merging into a life of

saintly purity, as the dawn merges into the full day, misses the romance of life, and knows nothing of any high elation of spirit such as he feels who spurs into reckless sin. There seems to be with some the impression that a rake makes the finest saint; that his devotion has a richer and deeper colour than that of the unspotted soul, and that even the girl who has had a frivolous and rebellious youth shall mellow into the wisest and kindest womanhood. Surely that is one of the wiles of the devil. It is a signal triumph of the grace of God when the drunkard is brought to a holy sobriety, when the profligate walks in a strong chastity, when the man of profane speech has the new song in his mouth. It is a great truth that the man who has been snatched as a brand from the burning has always a flame of grateful love kindled in his heart. It may be daringly said that the prodigal was dearer to his father than before he went astray. And so, if any man here has a memory stored with words and deeds of evil, if any man here is haunted by the faces of those he has wronged, the Gospel has its great message, not only of pardon, not only of cleansing, not only of renewal, but of a grace which can use the past to hallow the future. But it is better by far to have nothing to forget.

What blessings meet the man who has no memories of flagrant sins? "Saintliness," it has been finely said, "is not forfeited by the penitent." No, blessed be that grace of God by which we stand! But his way is a sore travail. His sins are all his life long finding him out. But the man with nothing to forget has no unavailing regret for those whose lives he has narrowed and embittered, no shadowing memories of eyes that looked reproach at him and of voices that appealed with unheeded tenderness, no recollections

of words and deeds that haunt his imagination and keep him back from holiness. The man who has nothing to forget bears an unblemished beauty, a fine balance of temper, a sweetness and depth of nature, a grace and gentleness which the shadowed spirit never attains. He walks the path that shines more and more unto the perfect day. And the man who has nothing to forget attains a strength and a power in the service of God which is denied to the others. Who are the strong saints who bear in every generation the burden of the service of God? They are Joseph with his holy dreams, and Samuel with his ear open to God's call, and John with his blameless youth, coming to its perfect flower in a holy old age. Even Paul can look back with that worthy pride, which has not a taint of Pharisaism in it, on a youth that was "touching the righteousness which is the law, blameless." For what is blessedness but a fellowship with God which has been life-long and unbroken, a character whose rounded beauty is after the fashion of His who did "always those things that please" God, and a strength which makes a man a leader in the service of his Lord. Ah, young men and women! covet this blessedness. "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." While the dew of youth is yet upon your soul consecrate yourselves to God. Make that covenant with God which is most easily made when there are no covenants with hell to break. Surrender your first thoughts to Jesus. Hear Him calling with wisdom's promise: "They that seek Me early shall find Me." And as you increase in wisdom and in stature, in favour with God and man, as you grow into the grace and knowledge of Christ, you shall understand the blessedness of Mary of Magdala, who had nothing to forget.

The second truth is the *satisfaction of a life whose sole passion is the love of Jesus.* Very plainly we must think of Mary as a simple, unlessoned woman, with no dower of beauty, and no grace or gift which lifted her into any eminence. She had not the Virgin Mary's greatness of soul; she had nothing of Martha's splendid energy and gift of speech; and she had not the power of pellucid brooding thought that gave a sober calm to the brow of Mary of Bethany. Her life had been hopelessly marred by her disorder. There seemed no joy for her as for other women. She had only to live through a barren waste of years. Yet here is a life wholly satisfied through a holy and spiritual passion of Jesus.

The applications of a truth like that crowd upon us! To love Jesus with that absorbed intensity that makes it the supreme passion of the heart is the hidden secret of the Christian life. It is good to assimilate the ideas of Jesus, and find your mind illuminated and your purposes directed by them. It is good to spend yourself in His service, and find your energies freely and joyfully exercised in it. It is good to see, in moments of faith, the coming of His kingdom, and to mark how all the toils and efforts and aspirations of men are hastening its consummation. But it is better to love Jesus. For then no word of His shall be dark, no call of His shall be strange, and the very desires of His heart shall be ours. Ah, until you have come to the hour when a sense of Christ's personal love and leading awakes within you that "sense of need which can be satisfied only by giving," that love which is stronger than death, you have not come to the hour for which your soul is waiting—waiting as the trees wait for the spring, as the poet waits for his song!

But there are some to whom this truth brings a special message. How many are the unsatisfied among us! The lives that are marred through some misfortune which robbed them of their youth; the lives that are blighted by some sorrow or disability which clouded their aspiring years; the lives which have found that their thirst for love and gladness, and even for content, is still unsatisfied; the lives that have attained the thing they craved and find it a hollow mockery — a glistering sorrow; the lives that know that age is coming upon them, and yet nothing is being done, nothing is accomplished! How these abound among us! What will supply all your need? Nothing else but the satisfaction of loving Jesus. I know the hardness which so many of you must endure—the toil and drudgery, the worry and anxiety and strife, the privations and sorrows, and the frequent failure in the thing you most pursue; yet I say that with it all, when this passion of love for Jesus, this uplifting of the heart in a glow of personal affection, shall possess you, a strange peace, a holy exultation, and a quenchless enthusiasm shall fill you, and life shall have a satisfaction of which the rich and the noble and the mighty do not dream. Thank God that there are lives among us like Mary's—lives despoiled of common good, denied the deep delight of human affections, marred and crossed and burdened, and yet a deep satisfaction is theirs, because their supreme passion is the love of Jesus.

The third truth that lies in this story of Mary is *the displaying of the greatest thing God hath prepared for them that love Him.* "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed

them unto us by His spirit." And surely the spirit of God was haunting the footsteps of Jesus that morning as He walked in the garden in His glory. The Holy Ghost was waiting and hungering to glorify Jesus in men's eyes, to take of the things of Christ, and show them to some expectant and desiring and prepared heart. And the one heart of all living upon the earth that was meetly prepared, on that first day of all days for this poor sin-smitten world of ours, was the heart of Mary Magdalene. It was her love which prepared her, and her love was her preparation. To hers of all mortal eyes was first given the beatific vision. She saw Jesus on earth as we shall see Him in heaven.

What a comforting message for the humble and contrite heart lies here. We wonder—we cannot help wondering in the grossness of our imperfect thoughts—why this surpassing glory was bestowed on Mary. We should have expected that to Peter as he went down into the sepulchre, or to John as he turned his sorrowful face homeward again, this unique honour would have been given. "God judges by a light that baffles mortal sight." He does not single out an apostle, but this gentle, holy, adoring woman, with her heart breaking for her Lord, and He requites her love, as love only can be requited, and He crowns her life with a glory which casts a halo round her head. How much does Jesus tell us by the fact that He appeared first unto Mary Magdalene. He tells us that, beyond all apostleships and all gifts, and all wisdom, and all speech, and all services he values love. He tells us that love shall ever have pre-eminence—for love is the eternal grace. "Whether there be prophecies they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. And now abideth faith, hope, love—these

three; but the greatest of these is love." In that day when Jesus rose from the dead prophecies had failed, tongues had ceased, knowledge had vanished away, faith was chilled to its dying, hope was quenched. "We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel" was the plaint of sorrowing hearts. But love never faileth, and to love Jesus showed Himself. And so in the world beyond, when faith has been lost in fruition and hope is swallowed up in sight, love shall abound, and the greatest thing God has prepared for them that love Him is what Mary saw—the face of Jesus—Lord of All.

XXI.—THE ROMAN CENTURION

XXI.

THE ROMAN CENTURION.

"And when the centurion, which stood over against Him, saw that He so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly, this Man was the Son of God."—MARK xv. 39.

ONE man, and one man only, is wholly competent to tell us the story of the death of Jesus. That man is this Roman centurion. It was he who sent his band across the brook Kedron, in the soft moonlight, to arrest Jesus. It was he who guarded Him as He was led to the house of Caiaphas, and then marched Him as a dangerous rebel to Pilate, and then to Herod, and then back to Pilate again. He overheard the strange parleying between Jesus and Pilate; he superintended the scourging; he looked on when the soldiers mocked Him; and it was by his lips that the message of Pilate's wife reached the governor's ears. At his word of command the glittering spears began to move along the way to Calvary; he saw the nails driven in, and then he stood with watchful eye and open ear, in the strength of his Roman discipline, and marked how Jesus died. I cannot tell you, and no man can tell you, the precise state of the blessed dead, but surely for all of us it shall be a state in which many things covered shall be revealed. And when the great multitude of the redeemed shall long to know the

whole story of the last great day, we shall press round this Roman centurion, and he will inflame our hearts as he tells us how Jesus loved unto the end.

I.

Of this man we know nothing certainly until he stands in the light of the dying face of Jesus. That he was a soldier assures us of an ingrained habit of obedience, a perfect courage, an unflinching loyalty, and an honest and greatly simple heart. That he was a Roman soldier tells us that he belonged to the most dauntless army the world has known, whose deeds of valour went back through an almost unbroken record of success through seven centuries. And that he was a centurion tells us that he was a man in middle life, who had seen service, and had risen through merit to his high command. No inexperienced stripling was ever appointed to a Roman post of authority. It may be safely said that among the centurions of the Roman army was to be found the very flower of honour and chivalry. The Roman Empire was already in decline; but, like every great organisation, it had begun to die at the heart. And when the pestilence of moral corruption had infected the governors and counsellors of Rome, there were still to be found in its armies men of fearless truth, of fine courtesy, and of incorruptible purity. How the governors in the New Testament stand out in contrast to its centurions! All the four centurions are men of moral, even of spiritual beauty. Of one of them the Jews said, "He loveth our nation, and hath built us a synagogue," and Jesus said, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." Of another, Cornelius, the record is that "he

was a just man, and one that feareth God." The third was Julius, the centurion of Augustus' band, who "courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty." And the fourth was this centurion at the cross, who, as the slow hours of the day passed away, watched Jesus die, and in the few and emphatic words of a soldier's lips, bore to Him his confident testimony.

II.

Now the question this man allows us to answer is what a man of a good and honest heart, with only a Roman's education, and with Pagan ideas, thought of Jesus when he saw Him die. He knew nothing about the life of Jesus. He was not even familiar with His name. "This Man" was the word that came to his tongue as he looked on His head sunken in death. But as he witnessed the dying of the Lord Jesus, the Roman's contempt was changed into an adoration that broke out into great and memorable words of suggestive confession.

His first witness to Jesus is "certainly this was a righteous Man." It was the innocence, the moral beauty, the unspotted righteousness of Jesus, which dawned upon him. He saw the crucifixion to be that horrible injustice, a judicial wrong. There the Roman in him spoke. Justice was the very breath of life to a Roman. With the cry of injustice any Brutus could inflame the city and its people to a white heat of passion. In spite of the accusations, in spite of the derision, in spite of Pilate's judgment, in spite of the dead weight of native prejudice, the centurion saw, with a flash of insight, into the character of

Jesus. This business of crucifixion was no new thing to him. He had seen the reckless criminal, the coarse murderer, the political assassin, hung on the cross. But here was such appealing meekness, such gentle words of blessing, such consideration, such absence of resentment, such heart-affecting prayers; here he saw a moral stainlessness that all the annals of history could not match; a deep conviction seized him, and he broke the stillness of that awful moment with his strong, soldier-like words: "Certainly this was a righteous Man." He had not learned the music of the Hebrew Psalms, but if he had, this wise and true-hearted man could surely have broken out in the fervent words: "Thou art fairer than the sons of men. Grace is poured into Thy lips. Therefore God hath blessed Thee for ever."

The centurion was arrested, not only by the character of Jesus, but by the manner of His dying. Jesus died as a hero dies. For as two of the Evangelists report, he cried: "Truly this Man was a Son of God." His primary meaning is that Jesus was plainly no ordinary mortal, no such man as he was himself, cast in a merely earthly mould, but, like the heroes who had done the great deeds of Roman valour, of the lineage of the gods. Such heroism in dying out-distanced all he knew, and he knew well the meaning of heroism. Sitting round the camp-fires he had heard and repeated the undying glories of the legions who had borne the Roman eagles through fire and flood, had fought with unsapped courage amid the tortures of thirst, and had tracked the barbarians through their pathless forests. And he had seen men die in the wild charge, throwing away their lives with an exultant shout; in the arena, with mortal pain bravely suffered; as

sentinels at their posts, with unflinching faithfulness. But never had he seen a death like this in which—as life dripped slowly away, as taunts were cast at Him that would have made a soldier blaze with fury—a holy calm, a perfect self-mastery, a Divine majesty breathed forth prayer and benediction. It was a soldier spirit who had witnessed that "Never man spake like this Man," and this fellow-soldier testified, "Never man died like this Man."

But we may, in justice to this heroic and fearless man, find a deeper thought in the words than that Jesus was righteous in His life, and played the hero in His death. We dare not press his words so far as to say that when he called Jesus "a Son of God," he meant what such words would have implied on the lips of a disciple—certainly not in the speech of Peter or of John. It may be questioned, in spite of Peter's confession, how far such words would have been filled with their highest meaning for any disciple when Jesus died. But they do mean that this centurion felt himself to be in the presence of a great mystery, and realised that Jesus was kin with Divinity. On his darkened Pagan mind there fell an awe and a sense of having been in the presence of the Divine. He saw the darkened sky, he felt the vibrating earth, he was appalled by the last great cry, and he looked up at the cross, and realised that the Divine Being whom Jesus had called His Father, had owned Him for a Son.

III.

Now this is what the Roman centurion saw in Jesus as he watched Him die, and when we remember what he

was in mind and training, we see that his confession was very great. It had the greatness of sincerity and of fearlessness. And yet, while we commend, we cannot but pity. We cannot refrain from thinking and whispering to ourselves, "If thou hadst but known the day of thy visitation." His eyes were holden. He saw in Jesus only what he had eyes to see. No man can do more. Were you to take a peasant into the National Gallery, and show him those masterpieces which are the costly treasures of the kingdom, from whose greatness men receive inspiration, his dull and uninformed eye would see little of their mastery of form and colour. Or were you to lead about the streets of this city a visitor who was ignorant of Scottish History, whose spirit had not been stirred by the dark scene of Edinburgh after Flodden, who did not know the tragic story of Queen Mary, who had no acquaintance with the mind and spirit of Knox, and was greatly dark about its literary and scientific associations, its sights and memorials would lose half their meaning for him. When Jesus walked in Jewry there were many who had no eyes to see Him. Some thought Him John the Baptist risen from the dead; others said He was the stern and lonely Elijah; others, who had heard His pathetic appeals, thought Him the weeping Jeremiah, others could say only that He was one of the prophets. We need not wonder, and we dare not blame this centurion for not seeing more in Jesus. God, who does not gather where He has not strewn, accounted this man's dim, imperfect faith for righteousness, and looked down with a glad approval when He testified, not only to the moral greatness, but to the Divine mystery in Jesus. To him there was given in the final judgment the exceeding great reward of the

promise, "Whoso shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven."

And yet all the saints and confessors since his day—from that dying thief who heard his honest, imperfect words, down to the last devout reader of the story—have looked on this centurion with a touch of pity. He spent a whole day with Jesus, he saw Him die, and yet he did not know Him to be the Lord. How were his eyes holden? What hindered him from discerning the wonderful truths? Let me try and tell you, for there are many among us to-day who see no more in Jesus than this centurion saw. To many Jesus is only the man of spotless righteousness, of heroic death, meeting injustice with calm and majesty, and of mysterious and unearthly origin—one in whom the Divine spark burned as in no other man. These have their eyes holden also. They stand with the dull-sighted vision of the centurion.

The first defect in the centurion was his *want of the sense of sin.* We do not realise how entirely we owe the poignant sense of sin which is, in lesser or in greater measure, so universal in Christendom to the teaching, the example, and, above all, to the cross of Christ. Wherever these lose their power the sense of sin becomes as dormant as a lost faculty. Mr Lecky says, in one of the most eloquent passages in his "History of European Morals," that "while the Greek and Roman world was perplexed by the mystery of being, and shadowed by the suffering of life, and while it was moved by the examples of great heroism, there was no sense of sin possessing men's hearts. Remorse was an unknown passion. A penitent's shame was impossible. The burden of guilt did not rest on even a criminal's heart. Men looked on deeds of infamy, and were not

shocked. The sin of the world and its moral corruption infected the air. Men were naked and not ashamed, not because they were innocent, but because no sense of guilt assailed them." Out of that poisoned, moral atmosphere this centurion came, and while he had the soldier's hardy virtues, no sense of personal defilement smote him, no passion for holiness ever seized him. He could not see in Jesus more than One who was righteous, and dying unjustly, died heroically, as one would who was a Son of God.

The second defect in the centurion was his *want of a true conception of God.* The god of whom he spoke was not the God and Father of Jesus Christ. His thoughts flashed back to some Pagan deity, who was fabled to dwell in a grotto, or was worshipped in some stately temple, or at best to one who was an unknown god, capricious in his will, dark in his purposes, and inscrutable in his dealing with men. Had he known that God "who is a Spirit," "who is light, and in whom there is no darkness at all," he might have looked up, and, in a vision, seen the Son of the living God. Had he for one moment seen what the dying thief saw—the pity and the longing after men—he would have been transformed by the renewing of his mind, and he would have known his Redeemer. Ah, well, we know it would have required more than a miracle of grace to have wrought this change. Only men who had the centuries of a spiritual faith behind them could "behold His glory—the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father—full of grace and truth."

The third defect in this centurion was his *ignorance of a love which will die to redeem.* That God so loved men as to die for them was to his darkened mind utterly

incredible. He could have understood one who, by wise word and patient deed, had nourished the aspirations and enlightened the minds of men. He could have understood one who died in a chivalrous struggle against wrong. He could have understood another Socrates drinking his cup of hemlock with a sober jest, treating death with unconcern. But a love of God for man so great that it would die to redeem such a coarsened criminal as that reviling thief, and was even then longing after that bewildered centurion, never dawned upon him. His mind and temper were precisely as those of the old crusader, who, when he was told of the crucifixion of Jesus, wished that he and his men had been on Calvary's hill, for then such a deed of wrong had not been done. Surely, had he realised the guilt of his sin, had he seen what his life was against the holiness of Jesus, and had he seen the truth about God, as a man will see a glimpse of heaven's blue in a day of cloud, and had he dreamed that there is a God who so loves that He will die to redeem man from his sin, he would not have stood over against the cross and cried. He would there and then have knelt down in his shining mail at the foot of the cross, and entered a nobler service, and begun to endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

IV.

There are men among us to-day, after all the centuries of the light and the teaching of Jesus and His cross, who see no more in Him than was seen by this sincere and honest centurion. Their mouths are full of the praise of the righteousness, the moral loveliness, the spiritual great-

ness of Jesus. Already every tongue is ready to confess Jesus as the supreme and only master of the moral life of man. Some of the most just and most eloquent tributes to Jesus have come from Unitarian thinkers, who speak with a grace and fervour which declare the Christian spirit. And as freely do all men acknowledge the heroism of His death. When the great deeds of human story—and very great some of them are—are brought into the light of the cross, they pale as the stars pale before the sun. Fathers have gone to the scaffold for sons; mothers have perished in the snow to keep their babes warm in their sheltering bosoms; friend has given up his life for friend in a rare and splendid devotion; patriots have died for their country; but when men pick out the bravest, and costliest, most loving and most beautiful of all deeds of dying, and place it beside the cross, it shrinks into insignificance. And all men feel that Jesus is not like other men. They confess the mystery of His being. The Divine, they say, was in Him, in a measure seen in no other man. "Certainly this was a righteous Man," "Truly this was a Son of God," are words that might have been coined to express their thoughts. The echo of them in varying degrees of earnest conviction and in never-failing felicity of language is ever on their lips.

But these do not enter into the secret of Jesus. They never see "the Lord." What do they need to cleanse their eyes? They need exactly what this centurion needed. When a vivid consciousness of his sin seizes a man; when the voice of God, speaking within him, calls up a past for which he can never atone, and convinces him of an evil nature, in which pride and envy and malice and guilty thought lodge as in their native home; when a haunting

sense of a spiritual personal God, who does not only set his sin in the light of His countenance, but bears it as a burden on His heart, becomes his constant and inescapable experience; when he realises that this God, who hates evil and cannot look upon it except with the anger and anguish of holiness, nevertheless loves him; when such a man looks at the cross of Jesus, he sees more than a righteous man dying a heroic death, and manifesting Himself to be the divinest of men, whose lineage is the most insoluble of mysteries. He sees "Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour, that He, by the grace of God, should taste death for every man." There is no other way—as centuries of experience prove beyond all question—of reaching faith in the eternal Son of God. Books of evidences for Christ and Christianity may confirm and inform the faith of a believing man. A wise and free and fearless apologetic may refute a proud and skilful attack. But the only evidence which will move mind and heart and will must appeal to the conscience; and the only apologetic which will successfully plead the deity of Jesus must rise above all questions of criticism, must base itself on the history, and prove itself in that experience in which both scholar and peasant have a common ground. Toplady's "Rock of Ages" is a more convincing and convicting apology than Butler's noble and unanswerable "Analogy." One vivid sight of the print of the nails alone can evoke the rapturous and adoring confession, "My Lord and my God."

This was the experience of Thomas Scott, the Socinian vicar. Coming out of a sick room, where he had been smitten with deep conviction of his sin, he looked anew

at Him whose claims he had belittled, and saw Him as Redeemer and Lord. Every page of his rich and heavenly commentary, so justly dear to Christian men, is studded with the praise of Him who is Lord of all. This was the experience of Thomas Chalmers, rising from his sick-bed in which he had faced the menace of death, and looking back on his past ministry as a term of years worse than wasted, because he had not known and believed the love of God in Christ. He set himself with a penitent's zeal to change the religious thought of Scotland, and to lead multitudes to the cross and to deeds of kindred sacrifice. This was the experience of one man recently taken from us—Richard Holt Hutton, of the *Spectator*, who, after many years of a merely Unitarian faith, was driven by the needs of his spirit to Jesus, and spent a long life in teaching the intellectual strength of his countrymen the glory of a crucified and risen Lord. Does a chilling wave of doubt ever pass over your spirit? Does Jesus now and again to your inquiring and perplexed mind seem only as a righteous man who died a heroic death—one who had some inscrutable kinship with the Divine? Let a sense of your sin be brought home to you. It is the worthiest and noblest mingling of thought and emotion which can possess a human spirit. It is the inevitable beginning of every step in a new ascent upwards. Let a higher and more spiritual conception of the personal God and your accountability to Him appear. Then you will say: "I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me," and revelation and duty and motive and hope be summed up in one word—Christ.

XXII.—JESUS AND THE INDIVIDUAL

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JESUS AND THE INDIVIDUAL.

"To-day shalt thou be with Me."—LUKE xxiii. 43.

JESUS had a supreme interest in and care for the individual soul. He did not estimate the family lightly. When He took up the little children in His arms He gave it a new consecration. His life and work were bound up with His Church. To build His Church was a great part of the work God gave Him to do, and He laid the foundation-stones of the society of faithful men before He went hence. Jesus loved the whole world, and died for desire of it. But for the reason that His ideal of the family, and the Church, and the world are to be realised only through a moral and spiritual change in the heart of every man, He cared supremely and intensely for the individual soul.

Any broad view of His life shows us how the individual fascinated, engrossed, absorbed Him. Every close scrutiny of His words or deeds confirms it. When He sits as a guest at a feast, He marks how each one of the company comports himself. When He stands beside the Pool of Bethesda, His eye is fixed upon the one impotent man. When He sees the procession of mourners pass out of the gate of Nain, He picks out the widowed mother in her woe. And thus, when He speaks, how the individual stimulates and rouses

Him. He can teach the multitudes until they forget day and night, and hunger and thirst. He can speak with disciples until their hearts burn within them. But He is at His best, if I may venture to say it, when face to face with the individual. Mark Him speaking with Nicodemus, or the woman of Samaria, or the rich young ruler, or with Martha in her sorrow. How marvellous are those conversations! In them you have a glimpse of the unsearchable riches of Christ. But if you would more fully realise how He longed for the individual, listen to His private prayers. Every man who calls upon God is revealed in his secret prayers. The names you repeat with a tireless constancy, and the requests you urge with the accent of urgency, discover your heart. How often He prayed for His disciples, one by one, that their faith might not fail we cannot tell. But when we read His high-priestly prayer, we find Him, in petition after petition, revealing His supreme interest in the individual soul. Human faces rose up, one by one, in His imagination, each recalling a peculiar need, and each prophetic of a separate destiny, as He said, "Not one of them is lost, but the son of perdition."

If that is a certain truth of the ministry of Jesus, we may expect to find it set in clear light in the day of the cross. And what we do find is that, throughout that long day of sorrow and of triumph, Jesus is individualising men, in spite of themselves. The light from the cross makes face after face stand out in clear relief. From the morning hour, when Caiaphas is compelled to reveal himself, and Pilate is startled and probed, and almost persuaded, to the evening when His mother, and the women of Galilee, and the disciple whom He loved, engross His care, the story is a continuous record of a holy passion for individuals. We would

not have been surprised had His atoning deed absorbed His thoughts, and in a rapt absorption He had died oblivious of men. We could have adored Him with a worshipping reverence had His heart gone out to the Church which He was purchasing with His own blood, or to that far-off event to which redemption moves. But even on His cross the individual absorbs Him. There is no word which more significantly exposes the inmost mind of Jesus, than that to the first believer in His cross, "To-day shalt *thou* be with *Me*."

Now, let us see how richly stored with grace this truth is. Let us think of it as one of the revelations of Jesus—one of His special messages to men. Let us see how full of comfort it is to trembling human hearts. Let us look by its light into three spheres of thought. Let us consider this supreme interest in the individual, first as *a revelation of the mind and heart of God;* secondly, *as a revelation of the value of each human life;* and thirdly, *as a revelation of the most imperative duty of the individual soul.*

I.

First: The supreme care of Jesus for the individual is a revelation of the mind and heart of God.—Every reader who compares the Old Testament with the New is struck with the contrast between them in their interest in the individual. In the Old Testament the individual counts for little. It is "the people of God," as a concrete unity, whom God leads, and teaches, and keeps as the apple of His eye, with whom He makes His covenant. Even to the later prophets, who realise the value of the soul, and teach its

accountability, the supreme concern is still "Israel." Now and again the great saints make their personal appeal to God, and speak face to face with Him. Now and again some woman in her childless anguish will dare to believe that God cares for her obscure sorrow, or some sick man makes his prayer out of God's pavilion, or a psalmist-seer looks up into heaven and beholds the face of God. But these were privileged souls. The ordinary man, the humble peasant who tilled the soil and looked up wonderingly into the Syrian blue, did not dare to think that he was of consequence to God. "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it."

Now, in Old Testament times, God did care for the humblest, simplest, meanest soul; but men did not know it, and would not have dared to believe it. Just as too intense a light would not only dazzle but blind us, such a truth would have dazzled and blinded them. Plainly the thought that the infinite God, whose greatness is unsearchable, whose ways are past finding out, cared for the individual man, knew his sorrows, and longed after his fellowship, was both inconceivable and incredible. And who among us, with the New Testament in our hands, has not shrunk from accepting it? Mark the hurrying crowds in the streets of our great cities; reckon up the millions of heathendom; think upon the countless multitudes of the dead! Who has not found himself trembling; who has not felt prayer to be beset with difficulty, and acceptance of the mercy of God a more daring venture of faith than he had dreamed, when he has considered the transcendence and almightiness of God? He might make laws for the universe, and set the stars in their courses, and call up with a thought a myriad of living things and annihilate

them with a breath, but does He, can He care for me, with my obscure life, my petty cares, my little human loves and desires? Have you not felt a chill passing over your heart when you have whispered the question to yourself?

But the difficulty, like many other difficulties of semi-atheism, is one only for the imagination, not for the reason. When men realise that God is a personality, and therefore a thinking and devising will; when they consider the meaning of greatness, and infinitude, and omnipotence; when they remember that He is thought of most surely when He is ethically conceived, when He is thought of as love—love which is always individual, and is not weakened by exercise—then it becomes sweet reasonableness to believe that God cares for every individual soul. Then we see that God could not care for and love His world except by loving and caring for its individuals. Then we see that Jesus is the revelation of God in His supreme interest in the individual.

Illustrations of this truth that only greatness can individualise abound. They are illustrations which are almost proofs. What is the test of a great mind among men? It is the power to master and manage details, to understand their significance, and to set them in their true relationship. Pour in upon a weak mind a crowd of facts, dates, suggestions, directions, inferences, counsels, objections, relationships. The mind is in a whirling maze. Take a great mind—a mind like Kepler's, looking up into the myriad multitude of the stars; like Gibbon's, marshalling the deeds of the centuries of the Decline and Fall of Rome; like Napoleon's, playing with the kingdoms of Europe as though they were men upon his chess-board,

and with his armies as though they were children's toys; or like Shakespeare's, making every servitor in his drama maintain his place with appropriate act—and you find it moving with an easy mastery over bewildering details. Or take a still more familiar and even finer illustration. You have listened to a great orchestra interpreting a masterpiece in music. To an untrained ear, the part played by many of the instruments was unrecognisable. One could imagine that were some minor instrument to cease, or were some blundering player to make a discord, it would matter little in so great a volume of sound. Perhaps even a skilled ear could not detect a trivial offence against the harmony. But to the master mind who wields the baton, each string and reed, and every insignificant instrument, is of supreme consequence. Not one of them would be lost without his knowledge and pain. If it be so with the finite mind of man, if the master mind can pick out every detail, individualise every circumstance, know and regard the consequence of every event and act, surely we can believe—although it should bewilder our imaginations—that each one of us, however obscure, however unregarded by man, is known by, and is of consequence to, that great God who is a loving and purposing will.

That is the truth which shines in the supreme care of Jesus for the individual. "Having seen Him, we have seen the Father also." When we hear Jesus say; "If God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, how much more will He clothe you, O ye of little faith?" "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall upon the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered." When we see Him calling His own sheep by

name, and leading them out; when we mark Him dealing with each disciple as a mother would deal with each child; when we hear Him weeping by the tomb of Lazarus; above all, when we follow His steps on the day of the cross, we see His supreme care for the individual, and we have revealed to us the mind and heart of God.

II.

Secondly: The supreme care of Jesus for the individual is a revelation of the value of each human life.—If the individual were of little account to God; if men were born and died, like the flies that dance in the setting sun and die when it is gone; if human souls fell like autumn leaves which mingle with the mould—then life would be a tragic pageant, and destiny the most mocking word that human lips could frame. For this is precisely the quality that marks the soul of man and gives value to his life—that he has a spiritual and immortal life consciously within him. Man looks forward with a prophetic eye; he has depths of love and hope in his being; he has a craving for an eternal life. To give a human spirit only this short space of years —years of no moment to God even while he is toiling and suffering throughout their course—would be to drop a single drop of water on a burning tongue. If the individual be only like a grain of sand by the sea-shore, the sport of every wave, or a drop out of the ocean to sink back into it again, what meaning or value is there in the struggle of life? And what torture is there in the thought of the quenching of its pure and purifying loves and hopes! It may be that for the greater men and women of each generation, conspicuous upon the stage, dealing with the forces which sway humanity, finding a sufficient zest in the exercise of

their compelling energy and determining genius, the span of their years would seem of value. Yet even they come to the hour when they cry, "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity," with an accent of bitter disappointment.* But it is hopeless to cozen oneself into thinking that for the ordinary man life has any value at all.

Bring this home in the simplest way—the way in which we all have felt it, and shall feel it again. In the early hours of this morning an obscure man surrendered his energy and passed into death. The morning light fell upon his most quiet face, and the mourners gathered round in stillness. They began to recall the slow moving years which had gone before. The joy of a woman at his birth; the innocent gladness of his boyhood; the wonder of his awakening mind; the dawn of love and ambition; the words of counsel, and hope, and prayer; the sorrows of the sterner years of life; the struggle against temptation; the inescapable misery of sin. And now the years of toil and drudgery and desire are all spent; he will be carried to a grave as obscure as was his life; and in a generation he will be only a memory to a few. If that be all, what is the value of such a life? What is love, or home, or friend, or hope, or even common joy, but each an opportunity for pain? What is duty but a sadness, a dreary round we have no heart to fulfil? Do you remember how the thought smote Tennyson?

> "And he, shall he,
> Man, her last work, who seemed so fair,
> Such splendid purpose in his eyes,
> Who roll'd the psalm to wintry skies,
> Who built him fanes of fruitless prayer,

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* *Cf.* F. W. H. Myers, "Essays: Modern," p. 267.

"Who loved, who suffer'd countless ills,
Who battled for the True, the Just,
Be blown about the desert dust
Or seal'd within the iron hills?

"No more? A monster then, a dream,
A discord. Dragons of the prime
That tare each other in their slime
Were mellow music match'd with him."

But if each man be of infinite value to God; if even an obscure life of toil, with its pains and hopes, and fears and prayers, be intimately known to God; if they are part of the eternal order; if God cares, and cares as only love can care, when holy desire is throbbing in the soul, when brave and costly deeds are done, when a passion for purity possesses the heart, what an infinite zest there is in living, what an unspeakable value there is in life! If the Master of the world's music would miss my voice in the harmony; if the Commander of the forces that fight for goodness and truth would miss my spear in the battle; if the Master Workman would find a blank were my place abandoned; if the Father would miss me from His home, life is a glorious opportunity, and its complete satisfaction is to find it eternal.

That is the revelation Jesus has given us in His supreme care for the individual. I do not know that there is any other assurance of it. When we see Him letting virtue pass out of Him that He might restore the years of an infirm, unnoticed, neglected beggar; healing the demoniac in his agony; flooding the soul of a woman of wasted life with peace and strength; moving about among the peasants of Galilee and the fishermen of its lake, and caring for their simple sorrows; assuring the

troubled hearts of disciples that He is preparing a place for them, where He will receive them to Himself; we see God in Christ caring for the individual soul. And we realise that Jesus was opening out His very heart when He said to His daring disciple: "To-day shalt thou be with Me."

III.

Thirdly: The supreme care of Jesus for the individual is a revelation of the most imperative duty of the individual soul.—If God so cares for the individual; if He loves with an individual and personal care; if His great purposes are bound up with the well-being of the individual soul, a duty borne in with a holy imperative is laid upon us. That duty is to make response to God. Nothing else—no other duty, no answer to any other call, no exercise of any gift, no fulfilment of any promise, no acquisition of any art or power—can take precedence of this. If God so loves and cares, and so needs the individual, the imperative business of life is to love God in return, to bring the spirit into correspondence with Him, and the life into harmony with His will. To put it in the old and deeply true words of the Evangelical preacher, the first, the last, the only certain duty of life is to save the soul.

Now there is secular cant which sneers at this urgent insistence that a man should save his soul. And there is a shallow way of thinking about spiritual things which has declared this first duty to be a subtle selfishness. And, truly, if a man be anxious only to escape the penalty of his sin—although every physician will tell you how eagerly men seek that—if he be concerned only to hide

his cowardly spirit from the wrath of God—although every man's conscience prompts him to that—it is a base and selfish thing. But that is not to save the soul. That is not to have the whole spiritual nature renewed in thought and feeling and will, and the spirit brought to trust in the mercy of God, and to long after His blessing. To save the soul is to make response to God, and thereby to allow His power to pass upon the spirit, and His will to fashion the life. The first offering a man must make to God is himself. His first duty, in a world where so much is amiss, is to bring himself into obedience. It is the idlest vanity, it is the blindest ignorance for a man to think he can bless his fellow-men, redeem their lives from evil, lift up their hearts to holiness, and buttress their wills to strength, when he himself has not begun to walk the narrow way, or to be strong in the grace of Jesus. "Physician, heal thyself," is both wisdom and duty.

This is the imperative duty of the individual soul, not only for his own sake, but for the sake of the commonweal. The reason underlying the supreme interest of Jesus was this—that the commonwealth of souls, or, as He called it, the Kingdom of God, is built up of individuals who have made response to God. It is not by edicts, nor by diplomacies, nor by legislation, that men are to be brought into blessedness. Our Puritan forefathers may not seem to have had the sweetness and light, the tolerance and grace, the width of mind and catholicity of temper we now think admirable. But this one thing they saw, this one thing they knew by an illuminating experience, that the commonwealth of upright and justice-doing and peace-loving men is to be attained only as

individual souls bow down to Jesus. Ah! brethren, this may seem a long and difficult way to the moralisation of the nations, the purifying of society, the order and blessedness of men; "the new heavens and the new earth in which dwelleth righteousness." But there is no shorter way—there is no other way. The course of history is strewn with the pathetic evidences of the failure of earnest men who have thought to bring in new eras of well-being for humanity by edicts, by the inculcation of ideas, by the contagion of romantic and heroic feeling, by the increase of a merely secular knowledge. They have failed, because they have not realised that to redeem humanity each individual man must be redeemed. One by one we are born, and one by one we die. One by one we must be born again. One by one we must surrender that stubborn selfishness, which is individualism with its motives and purposes unregenerated. One by one we pass into that kingdom of God, which is righteousness and peace and joy. Therefore Jesus sought out the individual soul. Therefore He was ever uttering His "I and thou," "thee and Me." Therefore He rejoiced when the malefactor leaned out toward Him. And therefore, to-day, I preach to you the most imperative duty of the soul. "Lovest thou Me" is the crowning question of the life of Jesus. In the spirit He stands to-day before each one of you. Will you make response? "Behold," He whispers, "I stand at the door and knock; if any man open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."

XXIII.—THE PIERCÉD CHRIST

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"They shall look on Him whom they pierced."—JOHN xix. 37.

IT was the custom of the Romans to allow the body of the crucified to remain on the cross until it rotted away. That practice was observed for the same reason that our ancestors in ruder days permitted the executed criminals to hang in chains on the gibbet until their bones fell asunder. It was intended to deepen the shame of their death and to intensify the horror at their crime. The Jewish law was nobler in its delicacy of feeling. It ordered the removal of the body at sunset. And these Jewish rulers, whose bitter and rancorous envy moved them to crucify Christ, had a fine sense of the fitness of things. Jesus died on the eve of the Passover Feast. It was not seemly when men were going up to the Temple to pray that three corpses should hang festering in the sun. At their request Pilate sent his soldiers to despatch the crucified by breaking their legs, and to give their bodies burial. With a heavy iron mallet they smashed the limbs of the two malefactors. When they came to Jesus they found that He was dead already, but a soldier, to make his death a certainty, lifted his lance and pierced Christ's side. Forth from the ruptured sac of the heart there gushed out blood and water. Jesus had died, in a double sense, of a broken

heart. This ruthless, wanton spear-thrust was the last and crowning shame of the cross.

In the years after Jesus was crucified his followers were brooding over the glory of his incarnation and the mystery of his cross. As they brooded and mused, they searched the Old Testament Scriptures to find the interpretation of his words and deeds. Jesus Himself had taught them this illuminating method of exposition. He had put the key of his personality and of his crowning deed into their hands when He said at the supper table, "They shall smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered abroad." As they recalled the sayings and doings of that fateful day, passage after passage of the Old Testament stood out in a new significance. They picked out the marks of Christ's Messianic glory. When the chief priests took the coins which Judas had flung down at their feet and bought the field to bury strangers in, they remembered that Jeremiah had written, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of Him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value, and gave them for the potter's field." When they marked that He was crucified between two thieves they read with a deeper understanding the words of Isaiah, "And He was numbered with the transgressors." When they pictured the soldiers sitting down at the foot of the cross, casting their dice for his seamless robe, the words of the psalm leaped into their minds, "They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots." When they heard again Christ's cry, "I thirst," and saw the kindly soldier hold up the sponge with its cooling vinegar, they heard another psalmist singing his strange music to them, "In my thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink." Here, when the

end of the day has come, and the thieves, dying slowly in their agony, have been despatched by the blows of the *crucifagium*, and Jesus, already cold in death, though left unmaimed, is gashed by the grim soldier's spear, they recall the words, "A bone of Him shall not be broken," "They shall look on Him whom they pierced." The meaning of the cross for these men, and for all men, is declared in the ancient prophecies of the Word.

Now these words with which John closes his account of the crucifixion are a prophecy of the book of Zechariah. Zechariah had seen his vision of a day yet to come, when the people of God, long outcast and alien, hardened in heart and rebellious in spirit, should return in penitential sorrow to the faith and fear and service of God. "I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplications, and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn." That mourning should be as bitter and as poignant as the broken-hearted sorrow a man has for his only son, or his first-born child. It shall be as widespread as was the mourning of Israel over its young hero, King Josiah, when he was fatally wounded at Megiddo. Josiah had gone forth to chivalrous battle in a cause which was not his own, and an archer's arrow had found him. As he was carried back to Jerusalem, up the valley of Hadadrimmon, men and women marked the stricken king slowly dying. And when he died Judah and Jerusalem mourned as Edinburgh mourned after Flodden, "When the flowers of the forest were a' wede away," or when Paris lamented when Mirabeau was dead. And the mourning was to be not only poignant and universal, but personal and individual. "The land shall mourn, every family apart—every husband and wife

apart." That far-off vision was fulfilled, said John, recording the spear-thrust in Christ's side, when men looked on Him whom they had pierced. They shall look on Him, and they shall mourn with that poignant and widespread and individual mourning which Zechariah recalled when Jerusalem wept for its dead king.

Let us consider, then, this mourning at the sight of the piercéd Christ. Let us distinguish the different kinds of mourning.

There is, to begin with, *the mourning of sympathy.*

The cross of Christ, in its simplest aspect, is the darkest tragedy of history. It touches every heart to sorrow. No one can read the story of Jesus, who was meek and lowly of heart, who took up little children in his arms, who touched the leper, sighed over the blind and wept over the dead, who walked in the lovely apparel of his holiness, and see Him, even when death has done its work, mutilated by the spear-thrust, without a shadow falling on the spirit. It matters not what men are, believers or unbelievers, with a sublime ideal of life, or evil and careless livers, quickly moved to emotion or hard and stoical in heart, this piercing seems to them all the most wanton crime and the crowning wrong. The fifth wound in Christ's body is the basest wound of all. A man has ceased to be human who is not stilled and solemnised and quickened to sympathy as he looks on the piercéd Christ.

The evidences of this sympathetic mourning over the cross are many and clear. The Christian church feels the call to sorrow more deeply as the centuries pass. We may not care to set apart a day to its special com-

memoration, as some great churches do. We may fear lest superstition and a craving for the luxury of devotion may creep in again with ceremonial rites and elaborate penances. But few can let Good Friday recur, and realise what it recalls, without confessing that there is no sorrow like Christ's sorrow. The three hours of Christ's dying almost eclipse the joy of his victory. Still more evident is the sympathy of those who are alien to the church of Christ. The Jew of to-day is as unrelenting in his denial of Christ's deity, as hostile to his claims, and as contemptuous to his cross as ever he was. Christ has not the marks of his Messiah. But the story of the cross moves him to a silent sympathy. He seldom mentions it. He feels it to be the most wilful blunder of his rulers, and the most hideous crime of his race. It is the deed which he would expunge, if he could, from the annals of his history. The Jew also, with the sympathy of a noble nature, mourns as he looks on Him whom they pierced.

This mourning of sympathy has a still more convincing proof and evidence in the universal consent of humanity. History recounts the story as the pre-eminent evil deed of all time. Literature touches the story with heavy and sombre sentences. Art invests its portrayal with all the sadness that deeply penetrating minds can feel. Music is always moved to a coronach of lamentation. They all are merely expressing with wisdom and understanding the pathos more dimly felt by careless hearts. A few years ago a company was gathered to an afternoon recital of music. The hall was crowded with youth and gaiety intent on some hours of pleasure. Towards the close of the programme a young girl sang her first

song as a promising pupil. Her fresh voice and her artless grace captivated the audience. The encore was imperative. But she had not prepared herself for such a reception, and she was at a loss what to sing. In a mood of trembling courage she chose a song dear to her own heart. She sang Watts's greatest hymn, as set to Mason's fitting music,

> "When I survey the wondrous cross
> On which the Prince of glory died,
> My richest gain I count but loss,
> And pour contempt on all my pride."

She was listened to in breathless silence. A thrill of rapture passed over them all. Women who were the moment before idle in thought and flippant in speech, were touched to their highest and tenderest moods. Little children wept. Strong men sat looking straight before them, keeping an iron grip on their emotion, lest they should be betrayed. The whole company were led back to the cross. They were looking on Him whom they pierced with the mourning of sympathy.

There is, in the second place, *the mourning of penitence.* The mourning of sympathy is the world's tribute to the unique sacrifice of Christ's death. But there is something deeper than the mourning of sympathy; there is the mourning of penitence. Sympathy may be as evanescent as the morning dew and as fruitless as a forgotten sigh. There are millions who have wept over Christ's sorrow who have never been drawn to his feet. The constant danger of all sympathy is to expend itself in tender and selfish feeling and in words of picturesque solace. There is a look at the pierced

Christ which sees more than his wounds. It sees the cause of them, the wrong of them, the guilt of them. That is the mourning, not only of sympathy, but of penitence.

Tradition, whether accurately or not no man can say, has inscribed the name of the soldier who thrust his spear in Christ's side as Longinus. Longinus was doubtless a coarse-grained, callous-minded, pitiless soldier. He was a type and a representative of those brave and reckless men who enlisted in the Roman legions and carried the eagles of the Empire to victory over the whole civilised world. I sometimes think I see Longinus when he returned to Rome sitting with his children and speaking of this day. I believe that as the soldier recalled the dying of Jesus his heart would relent, and regrets would steal over his spirit as he felt that the most ignoble deed his spear had done was to make that gash in Christ's side into which Thomas might have thrust his fingers. I will go with some daring even further. I think of Longinus growing old, and looking back again and again on the deeds of his younger years, and brooding and musing over that mystic and prophet of the Jews whom he helped to crucify. As he looks back the last scene rises into his recollection. His own needless spear-thrust is recalled, and the arrow of condemnation finds its place in his heart. I hear him cry, "Accursed hand that was trained to do battle in honourable war, accursed spear that had been often held aloft in the hour of chivalrous triumph, but now both dishonoured since they struck the dead Jesus. O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?" As the old man bowed his head in shame and the tears welled

up in his eyes, he passes from the mourning of sympathy to the mourning of penitence.

That is the passage we all need to make. You are not Longinus, you say. It was not your right hand which thrust the lance into the heart of Christ. No, but you and I play his part. For what is Longinus but the type and representative of all heedless and ruthless and wilful and wanton sin against Christ? The little child's hand, although at times raised in strange young defiance of simple obediences and lowly duties, does not give Christ his fifth and most dastardly wound. The disciple who forgets his allegiance and lives below the level of his vows does not pierce Christ's heart with this wanton stroke. But when men and women in reckless mood and with hard and impenitent mind commit those wilful deeds of blasphemy and sacrilege, of gross self-indulgence and pitiless cruelty to the weak, they strike with the lance of Longinus. There are more ways of piercing Christ's heart than with a Roman spear. Do you never indulge in lawless moods? Do you never harden your heart against poverty and outcastness? Are you never unjust and untrue, and unkind to those who can make no defence against your words and deeds? Does the beggar never stand at your gate, not only unfed, but unpitied? Are you never scornful, contemptuous, and bitter-tongued to those who cannot retaliate? "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren ye have done it unto Me." There are thrusts which pierce, not that poor, dead, ruptured, heart sac, which Longinus tore, but pierce the quick and living and loving heart of Christ. Your hands and mine have thrust in the spear, and as we look on Him whom we have pierced we have

the mourning, not of sympathy, but of penitence. Faber has set the truth in his familiar words :—

"O break, O break, hard heart of mine!
Thy weak self-love and guilty pride
His Pilate and his Judas were:
Jesus, our Lord, is crucified!"

Thirdly, there is *the mourning of despair.*

"They shall look on Him whom they pierced," is a prophecy daily being fulfilled, but there is one fulfilment yet to come. In Christian teaching this world is passing on to a consummation and end of all things. With that teaching the affirmations of history and the conclusions of science are in full accord. It is not only that there shall be crisis after crisis, judgment after judgment, age after age, but there shall be a consummation when all ages shall end. "Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the Kingdom to God, even the Father." "So shall it be in the end of the world. The Son of Man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend." "When the Son of Man shall come in his glory and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of his glory; and before Him shall be gathered all nations." There is much in the record of this consummation which has been left dark. There are some things in the prophecy of the last event of all of which we have lost the key. There are many things which have not been revealed. There are a few things which Christ did not know. But this is always clear, that in ways the finite, human imagination cannot clearly realise, we shall see Christ, and the Christ whom we shall see shall be Him whom we have pierced.

You all know how we have been led astray in our thoughts of the last judgment by a too literal interpretation of the prophecies. Mediæval painters have set on roof and on wall their conceptions of the final coming of Christ. They have read the words, "The Son of Man shall come in his glory and in the glory of his Father and in the glory of the holy angels," and, "Every eye shall see Him." They have pictured Christ in the midst of the angels of judgment, set high on a great white throne, with a face of inflexible scorn, and flashing eyes of implacable anger against those who have been ashamed of Him. These cannot abide the awful blaze of the wrath of the Lamb. Surely they do err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. What is the glory of the Son of Man? It is not a high and heedless scorn; not a swift and merciless vengeance; not an implacable anger. "We beheld his glory," is the hymn of his disciples, "the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." That is the glory of the Son of Man—fulness of grace and truth. Jesus is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. The wrath of Christ is the wrath of the Lamb, but of the Lamb who was slain. And yet it will be a dreadful thing to look upon the Son of Man even in the fulness of his glory when we look upon Him as one whom we have pierced. There will emerge the shame, the terror, and even the penalty of that day of final consummation. They will look on Jesus meek and lowly, gentle and pitying, as before. But they will see the wound they made in his side. They will remember their defiant disobediences and their wilful impenitences. And realising that the day of grace is past, they will have the mourning of despair.

Edward Burne Jones has set this truth in one of his noble conceptions. He pictures Christ coming in his glory. Angels fill the empyrean and press upon Him as they fly. A crown of simple loveliness is on his brow. A white robe symbolises his kinghood. His face is calm and sweet and gracious. There is lovelight in his eyes, and pitying patience on his lips. As He comes He draws aside his white robe and bares his side, and there is seen the wound which the soldier made. Every eye sees that piercéd side. Some have seen that wound in the riven side every day of their lives, and have sung the song of the water and the blood which was their sin's double cure. Others have seen it only with a passing sympathy. But others have mocked and scorned, and gone on their heady and wilful and self-indulgent way. Now they see that their sin pierced Christ. And as they recall their impenitence, they have the mourning of despair. They call on the rocks to cover them as they flee out of that presence, whose love and grace make up a great part of the sting of hell.

There are then these three ways of looking at the pierced Christ. You may look with sympathy; you may look with penitence; you may look with despair. But there is a fourth way of looking on Christ which is the only way that brings peace and healing and joy. It is the look which sees not only the wound, and not only the sin which caused it, but also the love and grace which bore it. It is not our mourning, not even the mourning of our penitence, which saves us. The look of the penitent is chastening and purifying. But he who looks only in penitence has never passed on beyond the cross in his pilgrimage. The look that saves is the look that believes

that on Him were laid the iniquities of us all. When God pours out his spirit of grace and of supplications we look in penitential mourning, but when the Spirit falls, in even larger measure, we see the pierced Christ in that faith which finds life for a look at the crucified One.

XXIV.—JOSEPH OF ARIMATHÆA

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JOSEPH OF ARIMATHÆA.

"And now when the even was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the Sabbath, Joseph of Arimathæa, an honourable counsellor, which also waited for the Kingdom of God, came, and went in boldly unto Pilate, and craved the body of Jesus."—MARK xv. 42, 43.

IT is significant that all the four Evangelists tell the deed of Joseph. We can understand why it was so indelibly imprinted on their memories, and was deemed so worthy of record. The day of Jesus' death had been one long sorrow and shame. From the midnight hour in Gethsemane, until Christ bowed His head in death, there had been the awful contrast between love and constancy and tender pity and holy sacrifice on the one side, and betrayal, denial, desertion, and derision on the other. But then at the close of it all, there is this brave and beautiful deed. It is a touch of tenderness after a day of unrelenting hate and cruel wrong.

> "How far that little candle throws his beams,
> So shines a good deed in this naughty world."

So with glad and reverent hearts these Evangelists pen the story that tells that even in so dark a day there was light at eventide.

I.

But now let us look at the doer of this good work on Jesus. His mind and spirit are made very clear to us. Each Evangelist adds some revealing trait. Joseph of Arimathæa was a man of means, of refined mind, and of high social position. He was a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, and held in good repute among his fellow-counsellors. He stood marked out from many by his high and serious mind, his incorruptible passion for justice, his native goodness of heart. He wore all through his years "the white flower of a blameless life." He belonged, to use a pardonable analogy, to that class to which our country in the days of her struggle for civil and religious liberty owed so much—the class of high-minded, devout, patriotic, country gentlemen.

We are told one very revealing thing about him. "He also waited for the Kingdom of God." The Kingdom of God was the phrase into which had been condensed all the high hopes and holy ambitions, all the dreams of a better state, and all the visions of the reign of God among men, foretold by prophet and psalmist. To wait for the Kingdom of God was to be one of that band of devout and prayerful men and women, who were steeped in the spirit of the Old Testament, who had sure faith in the God of Israel, who waited for the hour to strike when the Messiah would come, and the will of God be done on earth as it was in Heaven. It was that Kingdom which Simeon and Anna longed to see before death should seal their eyes; before whose narrow door Nicodemus stood and did not know it, or understand its call. It was that Kingdom which poor, blinded, reckless Barabbas and his fellow-

brigands sought to establish in their mistaken ungodly way. That he "waited," meant that in the heart of Joseph there was a noble discontent with the corruptions and miseries and bondages of the times, and an unquenchable longing for the reign of righteousness, peace, and joy. As he passed through the land and remembered the great days of old, his heart was pained within him. As he walked in the city and saw, as Jesus saw, iniquity infesting it, and the vultures of vengeance hovering over it, his mind was filled with brooding thoughts. And as he sat in the council and looked with his clear, honest eyes into the craft and chicanery of Caiaphas and his tools, hope almost died within him. What could such a man, with his shadowed spirit do, but join these who had lost everything but faith in God, who could only wait and long and pray for the Kingdom of God?

Very naturally this man became Jesus' disciple. Like the iron to its magnet he was drawn to Christ. Like the flower to the sun he turned his face to Jesus. In the crowds that stood spell-bound when Jesus flashed forth the light and truth of the Old Testament, in the company of those who re-told the unforgettable parables of Jesus, in the smaller band who sought His counsel, there was often to be seen the pale and eager face of Joseph of Arimathæa. The holiness of Jesus fascinated him. The compassion of Jesus for the people of Israel, "as sheep without a shepherd," caught both his imagination and his heart. The deeds of Jesus brought back the days that seemed for ever gone, when God's power was known in every valley and hill in the land. But although he was in heart and spirit a disciple of Jesus, he shrank, we learn, from joining His fellowship. It is the single dark line, the Evangelists

draw in their portrait of this pure and saintly man. It is the one blot on his character, yet we need not judge him too hardly. He had never seen Jesus, as Peter and James and John had seen Him, and even they saw in Jesus the Son of God only in moments of high spiritual exaltation. The cost of following Jesus, for Joseph, was much greater than it was to Andrew or Matthew or Nathaniel. Like another rich young ruler, his wealth and its power and charm held him back. And then he knew the relentless hate and remorseless persecution of the Sanhedrin. He knew the intense fanaticism of the Jews. For the fishermen, from the lake, to follow Jesus roused no keen feeling. But for a ruler, a man conspicuous in the public eye, to believe on Him, would raise a storm of passion which would have swept him out of his place. He did not come out and stand beside Him, scorning all loss and braving all consequence. Ah, what he missed! what he lost irrecoverably! Nay, what he suffered! But the deep love for truth in him, the ingrained chivalry of his soul, the high sense of his duty would not permit him to sit in silence when the guilty plot of Caiaphas was hatched, and the treachery of Judas was hired. "The same," writes the Evangelist, glad to chronicle his protest, "had not consented to the counsel and deed of them."

It was this man, rich, cultured, of conspicuous social position, of holy and blameless character, with his mind already enlightened by Jesus, and his heart drawn to Him, with everything true and just and pure within him, rising up in a moral horror at the wrong which is being done, who stood under the cross of Christ. The events of the day had all smitten his troubled, questioning, fearful heart. The cool, ruthless cunning of Caiaphas, the miserable

craven-spirited yielding of Pilate, the lamentations of the women of Jerusalem, the mockery of the soldiers, and the derision of his fellow-counsellors, all worked together to rouse the dormant heroism of Joseph. And as he stood over against the cross, and heard Christ's words, and at last saw Him die, not only reverence, not only a hot moral anger, not only an afflicting pity, but a victorious and liberating faith and a passion of remorse for his past shrinking smote him, and forthwith—heedless of the scornful looks, and of the muttered taunts of scribe and Sadducee, "he went in boldly unto Pilate," and with the hunger of a man eager to do a service to his Lord, and to atone for days of lost opportunity, he besought the body of Jesus. And then, in his own grave, prepared for his own costly burial, with his own hands, unheeding all thought of defilement, he laid Jesus to His rest.

> "He bears Him to his new-hewn tomb,
> Jesus, to whom he did not bow,
> He leaves Him in its sacred gloom,
> His Lord, his Saviour, now!"

II.

Now very plainly Jesus did more for Joseph of Arimathæa on the cross, and by the cross, than by all the words and deeds of His life. With him, as with every other man, the cross was a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death. Let us think of the deep and enduring spiritual changes which passed upon this disciple as he saw Jesus die.

The first of these was the *perfecting of his religious character.* The first and greatest work of the cross of

Christ upon the soul, is to free it from the burden of guilt. All of us look up humbly at the cross, sooner or later. We may begin our pilgrimage in many ways; one through love of holiness, another through loyalty to the word of Christ, another through adoration of His character. But, sooner or later, the burden of guilt is felt, and we humbly stand below the cross to find the burden roll back into the open grave at its foot. And the cross also reveals God, both in His holiness and love. Much as we realise God's holiness in His law, and God's love in His unfailing providence, they both are fully revealed only in the cross of Christ. I can well believe that even in heaven itself, where we shall understand that love and holiness are one, we shall yet fasten our eyes on the prints of the nails, that we may assure our hearts of them both. But the cross does more than work out redemption and teach us God. It perfects, with the swift ease of unveiled grace, our religious character. This man, Joseph, knew and revered Jesus; this man had been taken captive by the spell of His words, and had bowed down in spirit to Him, as the Leader of the souls of men. A faith, feeble and fearful, was hidden in his heart. But it was not until he stood below the cross, until its grace and power and irresistible appeal fell upon him, that his faith broke its bonds, and he did his daring, his lovely, his costly deed, and went down to his house that night, attended by a company of angels, and hearing their songs in his heart.

Ah, brethren, how many among us need this perfecting of the religious character! How many are there who need just one touch to make them holy! We know them well —they sit in all our churches. They often hold office, and do service for Christ. They are well-born, well-

nurtured, well-minded. They live clean, blameless lives; they are filled with reverence and adoration for Jesus; they treasure His words; they scorn the company of those who traduce His people or deride His name. They do not consent to the counsel and deed of wicked men. Yet they are not wholly surrendered to Jesus. Some fear of man which bringeth a snare, or some baser love of place or pleasure, or of a human face (so complex are we in our faulty humanity), mingling like an alloy among more pure and holy desires, keeps them back. Who has not sighed over such men? They need but one touch; one touch would inflame their hearts, set the new song in their mouth with their own distinctive music, make them break any bond that hinders them, and, rousing their dormant chivalries, lead them to do deeds of imperishable memory for Jesus. What is this touch which starts such love and awakens such devotion? It is the touch of the Holy Spirit. Where shall we feel its virtue passing into us? At the cross. As we stand looking up to, and deeply understanding the glory of, the cross, we shall be eager to bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus.

How clear is the proof of this oft-forgotten truth! The noble army of martyrs who passed through flame and sword to death; our own heroic succession of saints who stained the heather with their blood; the still larger company of holy men and women who hungered and thirsted after righteousness, who never wearied and never turned back in the service, whose hearts were full of a quenchless ardour for Jesus and His Kingdom even to old age, are they who have kept their eyes fastened on the cross. The long roll of patient men and women who have suffered in patience and endured life-long trial with that joy which is the altar-flame of their sacrifice, kept their

faces towards the cross. The Word was very dear to them; the song of the great saints was heard as they walked in the valley before them; but in the hours when even the word of God and the patience of the saints failed, they were renerved as they looked up at the cross. How many here need that touch? You reverence His word; you will let no man asperse His holiness; you accept His revelation of God! One thing thou lackest! Go and stand, for a few hours—for one quiet Sabbath afternoon—below His cross. Understand, bring home to your poor, frost-bound heart the greatness and the glory of that death. Then it will be spring-time within you, and the fountains of the great deep of devotion will be broken up, and you will do the deeds of costly and love-impelled daring. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ," cries one saint, who was proud of the brands of Jesus on his flesh. "He suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps," cries another, who could sleep in sweet peace in prison. "Hereby know we love," cries a third who lived in heaven upon earth, "because He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." They lived and died with their faces towards the cross.

The second spiritual change which passed upon Joseph as he witnessed the cross was an *enlightenment as to the use of his wealth.* Very evidently the chief talent God gave Joseph was his wealth, and all the power and influence which accrues to wealth. The ample means of Joseph might have given a kindly ministry to Jesus, when He was so homeless that, as He pathetically expressed it, He had "not where to lay His head." They might have given Him a more generous meal than the chafed ears of corn. They might have secured an entrance

for the word of Jesus among the highly-placed in Jerusalem. Joseph stood all the day idle in the market-place, and only at the eleventh hour, as he stood beside the cross, and discerned the grace of Him who was rich, and for his sake became poor, did he see a service he could do for Jesus. Alas! Jesus needed nothing now but a winding-sheet and a grave! Joseph of Arimathæa could not have been an apostle. Apostles are made only of more adventurous spirits. But his name might have been linked with that of Barnabas. He might have been a second Lazarus, and the story of the feast in Arimathæa, and the gladness of Jesus with His friend Joseph, might have been as moving as the holy idylls of Bethany. But now that he is enlightened by the cross, and "clad with sudden brightness like one inspired," he sees what he can do for Jesus. "He laid Him in his own new tomb." And wheresoever in all the world this Gospel shall be preached, there also this that this man hath done, shall be spoken of, for a memorial of him.

Now, in this age, when wealth is so greatly increased, and so widely diffused; when the income-tax yields a larger return year by year; when the legacy duties add millions more to the Treasury than even their framers expected, how much need is there for enlightenment in the use of riches? The Bible does not condemn riches. It nowhere demands that every man shall denude himself of his possessions, although Jesus teaches that the giving up of all a man has, may be at times not only a religious duty, but a spiritual necessity. The Bible frankly realises that wealth may be a symbol of splendid achievement. Many a man's wealth is the sign and seal of hours of toil, of stern self-denial, of wise forethought, of daring courage,

of the faithful discharge of responsibilities—and these are noble things. But the Bible from beginning to end is filled with warnings. The possession of riches is a constant peril to heart and life. The love of them is a blighting and searing passion—the root of all evil—and the right use of them is one of the triumphs of life and one of the most enriching disciplines through which a man can pass. Wealth is held by Jesus to be a talent to be used—an opportunity to be taken advantage of. Joseph saw his opportunity. The poor could have carried Jesus to His burial and wept their tears of desolation over His grave. Only the rich could have saved the body of His holy sacrifice from the ignominy of the Potter's Field, and given Him a tomb, fit for the dwelling-place of the angels.

How clearly would you see light as to the use of your wealth if you saw it as Joseph did, in the light of the cross. You store your house with treasures; pictures hang upon your walls; costly dainties grace your table; the marks of taste and care are evident in every appointment of your rooms. You spend lavishly in the education of your children; you spend as ungrudgingly on your own comfort and recreation. You mingle in the society of the rich and the refined, and that is always costly, and you have accustomed yourself to the accompaniments of a cultured life. There is, or at least there may be, nothing wrong in it all. 'He giveth us," says Paul, "richly all things to enjoy." Yes, but come and stand below the cross, look up into His dying face, or, as you now must do, into His expectant eyes. Spread out the books of your spending before Him, and let Him glance down at what you spend on self, and luxury, and the things of taste and beauty, and on what you sacrifice—we mock that word when we use it—for Him

and His Kingdom. Let Him ask you, as He points to His cross, if you have cared for His poor, if you have borne a due part in telling the story of His grace to the lost, helpless, miserable millions in heathen darkness, if you have heard the call of His servants in their need, and as you feel the confusion which must fall on every honest face, you will be enlightened, and you will go and use your wealth so as to heal the sorrows of men and bring an abundant reward back into your own bosom. Ah, it would not make your lives poorer; it would not make them less beautiful or less glad! It would lead you to the doing of the deeds whose memory even men will not allow to fade. Who would not have scorned and pitied Joseph had he been so intent on his petty state and his selfish pride, that he had no thought or care to give Jesus a tomb? On whom does Jesus shut the door in judgment with a nevermore! so decisively as on the rich man who fared sumptuously every day, and could look on the beggar at his gate, without relieving him? Face the cross in your spending, and in its light you shall see clearly.

There is one closing lesson from Joseph at the cross we cannot forbear to press home to your conscience. The sight of the cross perfected his religious character; it enlightened his mind in the use of his wealth. But it had a third effect, which was the root and cause of these two great changes—it *filled him with a penitent shame.* We can realise the remorse which was gnawing within him. Why had he held so long aloof from Jesus? Why had he shrunk from declaring himself? Why had he allowed three years of a ministry to be accomplished, and yet never once boldly stood beside Jesus? How questions and regrets pursued him, vexed him, smote him with their lash! He might

have known a living Lord—he knew only a dead Redeemer. He might have heard Christ's sweet welcome—he must wait for it now when it would mean less for Jesus to give it. Over this man's spirit throughout all his years there hung the shadow of the accusing and undying memory of having been only a "secret disciple, for fear of Jews." Now he is filled with a penitent shame, and his instant boldness in going into Pilate is the evidence of a spirit stung into a deed which shall place his penitence and his service beyond question and beyond recall. We shall not mark his weakness and cowardice too strictly. Who are we and what is our record that we should deal in hard judgment? But we shall be warned. Are there any here who reverence Jesus, who treasure His words, who know Him to be the Leader of the pure and holy among men? Are there any here who have been, time and time again, on the very brink of decision? Are there any here who know that their eternal peace and their moral attainment are bound up with one clear, bold, costly, public decision? Are there any here who know that Jesus marks them, and appeals to them as He who knows what is in men must have often marked Joseph, and appealed with silent looks to him to be true to his convictions? Why do you not confess His name and stand with His fervent and fearless disciples? "For fear of the Jews." Lest you should be "put out of the synagogue!" Some worldly friend, some petty reputation, some social standing, some public favour, some fear of loss, some shrinking from pain! Ah, how pitifully foolish you are! "Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive an hundred-fold, and shall inherit everlasting life."

XXV.—NICODEMUS

XXV.

NICODEMUS.

"And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred-pound weight." JOHN xix. 39.

IT was not unfitting that the wealth of Nicodemus should furnish fragrant spices for the body of Jesus, and his hands should help to lay Him in His grave. He was, in one sense, an intimate of Jesus, and this tender office became him well. It is only in John's Gospel that his name finds a place, and yet we know that every movement of Jesus during His three years' ministry was known to him. No other eye watched Jesus more closely; no other mind, not even that of Joseph of Arimathæa, was more fascinated by His character; no other man, in some sympathy with Jesus, knew the history and the motives of the counsels against Him. We feel a deep interest in Nicodemus, not only because he came so early in the ministry, "at the first," and because he came "by night"—a very significant detail—but because his name is associated with the fullest, heavenliest, and most appealing revelation Jesus ever made to man. To no other inquirer—as John reports the interview—did Jesus ever give so marvellous and so winsome a message. The worth and weight of the things we say to men mark our estimate

of them and our expectation from them. Jesus did not cast His pearls before swine, and the heavenly messages He lavished on Nicodemus declare how wistfully He longed after him, and hopefully He opened out His treasures of knowledge to him. Not even one of the apostles was allured to enter into the Kingdom by such holy temptations as he was. It was most fitting that one who had so long known Jesus, and had been so honoured by Him, should be found with his munificent gift, a chief mourner at His tomb.

But the question which haunts and perplexes and troubles the spirit about Nicodemus is—*What was his real and final relation to Jesus?* It is too easily assumed by some that Nicodemus was a real disciple, and that no man could hear Jesus so speak without yielding himself to Him. As if we had not the lamentations over Bethsaida, and Chorazin, and Capernaum, and the warning and pleading with Iscariot, to teach us that men may be led to look right up into heaven and yet not enter in. As if we do not know that men have been hearing a fuller and clearer Gospel than Nicodemus heard, hearing One speak from heaven—hearing the very voice of the Spirit of God, and yet turning straightway to evil. It is going much beyond the record to assume that Nicodemus accepted Jesus and entered the Kingdom. We can estimate, though with diffidence, where he stood until he came to the close of the day of the cross. But what he had become by the hour when he laid the mixture of myrrh and aloes between the linen bands that swathed the body of Jesus, and spread some of its profuse abundance in the tomb, and what he was in the troublous days of the infant church, when the Sanhedrin harried its poor

saints, are questions less easily answered. Yet upon the answer depends our judgment of the man and the lessons of his history.

I.

Nicodemus was a man of wealth, of education, and of good repute in Jerusalem. He was a Pharisee, and a member of the Sanhedrin. Jesus calls him a "master of Israel." He was evidently a friend of Joseph of Arimathæa, and as is clearly indicated in the conversation with Jesus, he was one of those who waited for the Kingdom of God. He had in great likelihood been brought into conviction of sin, had been smitten in conscience by the preaching of John, and trembled on the brink of the waters of John's baptism. But he had hesitated and hung back. He had been arrested by the teaching and miracles of Jesus. Beyond these bare details we know little else of him. No other Evangelist except John, who knew the members of the Sanhedrin with a personal intimacy, mentions his name, and he very significantly adds no characterising phrase as he does to Joseph of Arimathæa. We are therefore left to the examination of the three scenes in which he appears, to gather our conception of his relation to Jesus.

Nicodemus stole out of his own house that eventful night, and made his way in the darkness, to become an inquirer at the feet of Jesus with a troubled heart. He knew enough about Jesus to know where to go. It had been better for him, it had been the first chapter of a more blessed history, had he gone in to Jesus openly, honestly, fearlessly, in the eyes of all Jerusalem. But it was better

to come by night than not to come at all, and it was an act which no other Pharisee in the city would have humbled himself to do—to consult the young prophet of Nazareth. And Jesus shows us both by His grace and gentleness, and by the golden sentences He lavished upon him, how He sympathised both with the old man's anxiety, and with his secrecy and fear. But in the interview Nicodemus was met with a directness of thrust he had not anticipated. Clear through all the phrases Nicodemus had been framing as he crept through Jerusalem on the way to Jesus, deep down into his conscience, Jesus cut with His unescapable demand: "Ye must be born again." Nicodemus plainly did not yet "see" the Kingdom of God. He still thought of it as set in some visible framework, in which he would hold a conspicuous place. That the Kingdom of Heaven was first of all a state of soul, an inward relation to God, had not yet dawned upon him. But the doctrine of the new birth did not trouble the mind of Nicodemus. He knew well enough what Jesus demanded. It was not an alien conception to any man with the Old Testament prophets in his hand. John the Baptist had made its meaning clear to all Jerusalem. It was not the mind but the conscience of Nicodemus that the call troubled. The answer he gives: "Can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born?" is merely a bit of fence such as every man's heart prompts him to, when he is close pressed by spiritual realities. He is defending himself to his own accusing conscience; he is telling himself that he is too old for the change; and he is parrying the thrust of Jesus. Then Jesus, just as a wise and patient and loving teacher will sit down with a dull and

resentful scholar, and teach him the lesson he has not caught, all over again, repeated His demand in fuller and clearer terms, and added His parable of the "wind that bloweth where it listeth," to hint that even now Nicodemus was feeling the breath of the Spirit. But the only answer was: "How can these things be?" Jesus was vexed and disappointed by this crass and unbelieving question, and in rebuke He says: "Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?" "If I have told you earthly things and ye believe not, how will ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?" If He had spoken of "earthly things," the things level with experience, the things which can be verified here and now, how could he believe if Jesus should pass on to speak of "heavenly things"—of the cross, and the everlasting Gospel, and the infinite love of God and its purpose? And yet this man of stubborn will and of guilty conscience, who knew well that he should have been down with John the Baptist passing through the water of baptism, whose heart told him, in the hours when he allowed it to speak clearly within him, that he should not be sitting in the Jewish council, but taking his stand with John's disciples, Jesus goes on to allure by speaking of these very heavenly things, and opening up the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. And as He dismisses this unconquered and unquickened and unsurrendered Pharisee, He looks at him, parting with him at the door, and with the word that rankled in his conscience all his days, He said: "He that doeth truth cometh to the light that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God." But Nicodemus crept back to his house, and did not come to the light, and in sleepless hours of remorse kept his

wounded conscience, his place in the Sanhedrin, and his repute among men.

The second time we see him his conduct is not much more creditable. He is sitting in the council where they are awaiting the return of the officers sent to arrest Jesus. He hears the bold confession of these men—men, mark you, dependent for their office and their daily bread upon the pleasure of their masters—"Never man spake like this Man." He hears the angry outburst of hate, and then there come his cautious words, ever careful of himself: "Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth?" There is a time when it is a shame to be silent. There is a time when both truth and honour call for defence at any cost. He had heard Jesus. He knew the works He did. He had but to be as bold as the officers to have played the man. If ever a man was called to confess Christ, that man was Nicodemus in that hour. His answer shows the spirit of the craven taking refuge behind a general rule. He refused to associate himself with the defence of Jesus. He went down to his own house with a deepened remorse. Jesus, with a renewal of His former grief, because again Nicodemus did not know his hour, and had again lost his opportunity, went unto the Mount of Olives.

In the third scene he plays a nobler part. What are we to think of the change? The death of Jesus has shocked, startled, awed and rebuked him. He would not have been human if a revulsion of feeling had not seized him. He would not have been a man with a living conscience if a moral horror at the murder of Jesus had not smitten him. He would not have had a trace of goodness if the words of Jesus, and His blessed life and

spotless beauty of holiness had not shone out in their power now. He would not have had a sincere desire towards Jesus if he had not been willing and eager to pay some respect to His grave. With Joseph doing his really bold and self-forgetful deed, it was not so difficult for Nicodemus "also" to offer his contribution. For who does not know the regrets for things left undone when death has put them beyond our power to do? The most loyal heart has questionings then. But if we can recall unkindness in word, needless bitterness in opposition, occasions of thoughtless or cowardly neglect, how poignant is our shame, how eager to make amends! "As we drove into Glasgow," writes Macaulay in his diary, "I saw, Death of Sir Robert Peel, placarded at a newsman's. I was extremely shocked. Thank God, I had shaken hands cordially with the poor fellow, after all our blows given and received. If he is buried publicly, I will certainly follow his coffin. Once I little thought that I should have cried for his death." In such fashion the memory and the imagination of Nicodemus were at work, and his conscience was pealing within him, and prompting him to some deed of tardy reparation, some open mark of respect. This extravagant gift of myrrh and aloes was only a symbol of regret. It was an offering in affectionate remembrance of the true, tender, brave, young Galilean, who had nearly carried Nicodemus away, but now was dead—yet still deserving of a costly burial.

It may seem ungracious, and it is no welcome office, to adjudge Nicodemus a place outside the Kingdom of God. It is not done but in the deepest sympathy with the difficulties of his position. Yet when we remember that no other of the Evangelists know anything of him,

when we recall that significant word of John, surely pointing to Nicodemus, "Nevertheless, among the chief rulers also many believed on Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue, for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God;" when we consider that Jesus uttered His hard sayings to drive away half-hearted disciples; and when we look at the picture of the fearful and cautious self-centred and unsurrendered man showing through all his acts, we cannot escape counting Him as the man who made the greatest refusal of which any Gospel tells.

II.

This story of Nicodemus is the warning record of the man who was almost persuaded, who missed marvellously great opportunities, who resisted the Spirit of God and dallied with the call of Jesus, whose single act of grace at the grave of Jesus makes his spiritual history the more pathetically sad.

The first thought we have in reviewing such a history as this is *the largeness of the class to which Nicodemus belongs.* The kin of Nicodemus in motive, in conduct, and in destiny, abounds among us. Jesus has only a two-fold classification, and in the final judgment there shall be only sheep and goats. But here and now, and in the case of living men, whose time of probation is not yet past, how great is the number of those who come near Jesus, yet make no definite decision about Him, and are no more in reality disciples of Jesus than was Nicodemus. Our synagogues also are full of men who believe, after a

fashion, but whose belief is not operative on their life, and is as valueless as that of the rulers in Christ's own time. There are many men who are honest and sincere, who have an interest in religion, and a sure conviction that the moral well-being of mankind is bound up with Jesus, but because of their pre-possessions, or their love of honour, or their fear of public repute, do not take the decisive step. That decisive step is something as full of trial to them as to stand by Christ's side was to Nicodemus. It may be to espouse some unpopular cause, to enter some denomination with little social prestige, to take up some bit of service which is costly of time and money, and will provoke the scorn of gross-minded and worldly men—there they know the call of Jesus directs, but they will not hear it. They also, like Nicodemus, have dull conceptions of the mysteries of the Gospel, a distrust of its austerities, a suspicion of its enthusiasts, a shrinking from Christ's hard sayings, a perplexity when they really face His great claims. For although we stand to the revelation of God in Christ in a very different mental attitude from that in which Nicodemus stood, and although it is easier far for us to believe than for him, and although our condemnation will be heavier than His, yet the spiritual decision we must make is precisely the same. This large class of men, who enquire and are drawn to Jesus, who in their hearts reverence Him, are yet never moved to that faith which confesses and follows, and to that rapture which takes them out of themselves. What many men need, who sit in our churches with uneasy consciences, who have a vexing mistrust that the root of the matter is not in them, is precisely what Nicodemus needed—to be born again of the Spirit of God, and then to stand forward in a bold confession of Jesus.

There may be, I know well, a genuine and deep root of faith which yet may fail for years to manifest itself in heroic and costly deed. Every believer ought to be ready for martyrdom, and yet how many would find their grace and goodness not sufficient for that stern test? But when men whose eyes have been fixed for years on Jesus, who are compelled again and again, by life's sorrows and time's awakening events, to face His claim to redeem and to comfort, and to resolve their relation to Him, yet definitely hold back, and know they hold back, we cannot class them as disciples at all. They may give generous gifts to the cause of God. They may have a delight in sacrifice for Christ. A munificent gift of aloes, steeped in myrrh, is a tribute they will eagerly pay. They will call Jesus a teacher sent from God, who has done the works which no man can do except God be with Him, but they do not boldly and openly confess Him. A worldly prudence holds them back. And when life is over, the vexing question besets us as to whether they shall, at the last, be owned as sons of God. We are not called upon to answer it. They lie in the great and wide mercy of God. But we remember with a shadow on our hearts the words, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of Him shall the Son of Man be ashamed when He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels," and in the annals of time they must be classed with Nicodemus.

The second thought we have is: *How much such men as Nicodemus lose.* When we think on this, our judgment is almost blinded by pity. Whatever be their fate when they pass to their account, their loss here and now is incalculable. They lose the wonderful liberation of mind, the gathering

up of their whole nature under a dominant holiness—they lose even self-respect. And they lose all peace. They have always a hot and unquiet heart. There are two men in the last day of the life of Jesus who have peace. One is Caiaphas; the other is John. Caiaphas had no doubts, no scruples, no fears. He went down from the condemnation of Jesus to his house with the self-complacency of one who had successfully done a difficult duty. John had no shadow on his heart. He went down from the cross, with Mary on his arm, in the uncheckered sunshine of a spirit keeping a holy charge. The men of the world to-day, who have their portion in this life, whose belly is filled with hid treasure, are satisfied without beholding God's likeness. The disciple of Jesus who stands beside the cross, and goes down from it with His commands as the holy imperative of his heart, has perfect peace. But the man who is afraid to let his convictions press him, who seeks the company and yet neglects the counsels of Jesus, who hesitates as to his allegiance to Him, is one of the most miserable of men. The most miserable man in the Sanhedrin was Nicodemus—the halting, unresolved man.

But this is only the margin of the loss. They not only lose all that is most worth knowing, and all that makes life worth living, but they become impoverished in their very nature. Had Nicodemus gone down into the waters of the new birth, what a marvellous gain would have been his! He would have known the "earthly things." He would have seen a world made new, because he looked at it with new eyes. He would have felt the thrill of a new and holy purpose. He would have known the enlargement of all his powers of imagination, and judgment, and thought, and memory. He would have experienced the develop-

ment of new faculties. He would have awaked to new felicities—the rapture of prayer, the music in the psalms of the saints, the fellowship of the people of God. And the "heavenly things" would have been revealed to him—the uplifting knowledge of the love and purpose of God, the mystery, and the grace, and the power of the cross,—all the wisdom of the scholar in the school of Christ. How great is the loss! The least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. He decreases, but the disciple of Jesus increases. One pities men and women who are robbed of the joy and gladness of youth; one commiserates still more those who make nothing of their older years and come to their graves broken and unhonoured. But still more to be lamented is he who stands looking wistfully into the kingdom of heaven, who passes its gate time and time again, who sits down and catches some of its music, who has felt the angel's hands on his wrists to compel him to come in, and yet has never entered. For fear of their Sanhedrin, or their reputation, or their comfort, or for fear of some yet more sordid loss, such men do not stake all on their acceptance of Christ—and they suffer a loss which Jesus only can estimate. "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

The third thought we have is *the remedy for this state of indecision.* What such men require is not more evidence, or more proof, or new statement of what seems to block their way. The only real impediment is within. Let any man who is a member of this large class first sum up the impression Jesus has made upon him; let him consider in an hour of quiet reflection who Jesus is, and what He has done; let him allow the full light of the revelation of Christ's word and character and cross to shine upon his spirit. Then let

him take the second and decisive step. Let him give an instant obedience to what he feels ought to be done—to the doing of that thing which clamantly calls to him. Whether it be the giving up of a habit which has been binding him to a low life and to evil thoughts, or the instant quitting of a companionship which is seductive to sin, or the burning of the books which have held a fouler spell over him than any book of sorcery ever held, or the abandonment of a business whose profits are tainted by wrong, or the open confession to his own household that henceforth life is to be lived on a new basis, or the resolute surrender of his energies to a costly Christian service—whatever may be the decisive step he feels called upon to make in response to the impression made on him by Jesus, let him take it, and it will settle his relation to Christ, and take him out of the miserable class whom we rank with Nicodemus. It will do more than fix his relationship. It will illumine his mind. It will give him the light in which he shall see light. He will "see," if he does not "enter into," the Kingdom of God. "If any man is willing to do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine." He will find that words and mysteries which seemed dark, incredible, forbidding, will become the well-loved expressions of the most comforting certainties. Had Nicodemus given one decisive act of obedience, he would have had a more discerning faith and a more constraining love, and a nobler ministry than a mixture of myrrh and aloes. And he would have been ranked with the saints of God, to whom would have been made known the mysteries of the Kingdom of God.

Oh, my fellow-men, why will ye not decide? Upon the conscience of every man here, who is out of Christ, there

lies a duty, impressed on you through your knowledge of Jesus, which calls for instant obedience. That duty is to be loyal to the claims and the commands of Jesus in so far as they have appealed to you. It passes, at a single step, into a willingness to join the fellowship of those who bear His name. And it passes almost as easily into that receptiveness of faith, which understands, not only His life, but His love and His cross. These are they who hear His voice, and follow Him. Will you drift into that large company who fail Him? Emerson has written

> "No accent of the Holy Ghost
> This heedless world hath ever lost."

It is not true. It is not true in any sense of the words. There have been accents of the Holy Ghost, just as there are sounds in Nature, which there have been no ears to hear. There have been accents of the Holy Ghost you and I have lost, else we had been wiser, and purer, and holier men and women than we are. There were accents of the Holy Ghost which Nicodemus lost, for he who will not answer when Jesus calls, shall hear the voice ever less clearly. It is enough simply to neglect the great salvation. This is what Nicodemus and all his kinsmen do. Shall you be found among them? God forbid!

XXVI.—THE RENT VEIL

XXVI.

THE RENT VEIL

"And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.—MATTHEW xxvii. 51.

IN the Christian view of the world, the day of the cross is the high day of the world's history. By the way of the cross of Jesus, as by an open door, the whole world of created life passed upward into a new kingdom — the Kingdom of Heaven. And quite apart from any doctrine devoutly accepted by Christian faith, the deed of Calvary, has been, and is, the most dominant fact in history. The cross has become the symbol of devotion, the measure of duty, and the impulse to righteousness for the civilised world. The nations who have accepted its message, even although many of their members know it only in name, and live selfish, earthy, and sordid lives, lead in the van, and they are imposing their wills, enlightened by its grace, on lower races. The finer spirits among them have only one aim: to fashion their lives after His who died upon the cross, and to lead all men into its secret of love.

The Christian view further asserts, what is not so universally accepted, that the power and blessing of the cross of Jesus spring from what it has done. It has given a new knowledge of God and of man; has set forth a moral ideal beyond the unaided power of man to conceive; and, this

above all, has brought God and man into a new relation of redeeming love on one side and responsive trust on the other. That is the truth vouched for by millions of living men. It is the truth maintained by the apostles. It is the truth which beats as a constant impulse in the hearts of the writers of the Gospels. They tell the story of the day of the cross with a fulness of detail and a solemnised restraint, not because it is a deed of horror, not because of their personal interest in Jesus, not because of its noble testimony to righteousness, but because they believe that on the day of the cross the eternal Son of God became "the propitiation for the sins of the whole world."

It is therefore with a purpose, whose importance we are apt to overlook, that the Evangelists tell us that in the moment when Jesus died, "Behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom." No Jewish reader of the Gospel would miss the import of that sentence The veil of the temple was the woven curtain of blue and purple and scarlet and fine twined linen which hung between its inner and outer courts. The outer court was the Holy Place in which the ordinary priests ministered. But within the veil was the Holy of Holies, the "shrine, remote, occult, untrod," into which the High Priest entered, alone, once a year, with his basin of blood, to make atonement for the sin of the people. The rending of that veil was an event whose pregnant significance needed little exposition. The priests who heard the tearing of its interwoven strands, turned to gaze into the cloistered seclusion of God's inmost sanctuary, and then looked upon each other's ashen faces with questioning eyes. The people who were told the story saw its meaning in a flash of light. And Christian teachers, from these recording Evangelists to the eloquent

author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, entered with eager joy into the conclusive evidence of the rent veil. The Holy Ghost signified to them that access to God, unhindered by sin and without the mediation of man, was open to all mankind.

The rent veil had therefore a momentous significance. As Christian minds considered it, three suggestions arrested them. The rent veil was *an interpretation*, *a symbol*, and *a prophecy*. It was an interpretation of the death of Jesus—the way into the holiest of all was now made manifest. It was a symbol of the passing away of the priest and his ceremonies. And it was a prophecy of the entrance, at last, for all the people of God into His eternal presence and communion. These three great ends, with all the revelation which shines through them, and all the motives that break from them, and all the hopes that cluster round them, were wrought out by the deed done in the day of the cross.

I.

The rent veil was an interpretation of the death of Jesus. Year after year the Jewish high priest entered in with the sacrificial blood to sprinkle the altar. Year by year, as their own hearts told them, this act of atonement had to be repeated. It did not make the comers thereunto perfect. There remained that gnawing conscience, or as we would say, consciousness of sins, not taken away. But when Jesus, in His dying moment, uttered the words: "It is finished"—both a human sigh of relief and a holy cry of triumph—the last, the perfect sacrifice for sin was made. All other sacrifices were abolished. They had been but

makeshifts, and hints, and preparatives. All sacrifices whatsoever, not only the Jewish sacrificial offerings, but the sacrifices of humanity—as real although not so perfect, as much accepted by God, although not so filled with His light, as the slain lamb of the Temple—were rendered obsolete, and were ready to vanish away. "By one offering He perfected for ever them that are sanctified." God was reconciled to man by an eternal redemption. The exclusion from the presence of God passed away in the rending of the veil.

Now that great truth has found a sure lodgment in the minds of men. To those who have accepted it in a clear consciousness of its grace, it has been the source of their peace and the wellspring of an unwearying devotion. It has made itself a power in the minds of all men who knew the revelation of God in Christ. The one truth to-day which all men accept, which sometimes blind men to other truths, is that God is love. Into every heart there has come the assurance that whatever may be a man's attitude towards God, He has been reconciled to man. That conception is an indestructible possession of the consciousness of men in Christian lands, and it is as strikingly absent beyond them. And it is due, in a way some do not imagine, to the teaching of Jesus, consummated and verified on the cross. The veil that hung between man and God—that must hang between sin and holiness—has been rent in twain by the one perfect, finished sacrifice of Christ.

That truth, however, seems to human hearts too great to be true, and there are two darkening departures from it in the teaching of men who profess to accept it. There is one great Church in Christendom which has not pondered the rent veil. It has substituted the Mass for the Lord's

Supper. Day by day, under a priestly consecration, we are told, the bread of the sacrament becomes the flesh, and the wine becomes the blood of Jesus. They are then lifted up to God in sacrifice by priestly hands. And the confessed purpose of this miracle, which honest eyes cannot see, and of this elevation of the host, which men with the New Testament in their hands know to be a vain oblation, is to represent what He is still doing in Heaven, and to continue the sacrifice of Jesus offered to an offended God. Peter and Paul and John knew nothing of this sacrifice. The accounts of the Lord's Supper distinctly deny it. It is a product of superstition and priestcraft. And it has forgotten the interpretation of the rent veil. In the instant that the veil was rent in twain, all sacrifice passed away. "Christ entered once into the Holy Place, having obtained eternal redemption." He has offered one sacrifice for sins for ever. God has been once for all, and by one final, decisive act, reconciled unto men. All that is needed now, for men who have followed the forerunner into the fellowship of God, is to eat and drink in remembrance of Him, and as they show forth His death, receive His grace into their souls. The veil has been rent in twain.

The second departure from the full recognition of this truth is more innocent and yet not without loss. All of us have heard what has been called "the Gospel" preached, especially by men to whom has been given the gifts and the office of the evangelist. They have appealed to men to draw near unto God and He will draw near unto them, to come to Him with true penitential confession, and His anger will be turned away, to rend their hearts and humble themselves, and God will turn from His wrath and be reconciled to them. But that is

not the Gospel of the cross; that is a meagre version of the Old Testament message. It is a poorer gospel than even Jeremiah knew; it has not understood the teaching of the rent veil. Underneath all such preaching there lurks in subtle ambush that fetter on the souls of men—salvation by works. Its message is that, as we turn to God, as we offer the propitiation of our confession, or our repentance, or our humiliation, God will be reconciled to us. But God is now already reconciled to all men. By one act, needing neither to be repeated nor to be supplemented, God has been propitiated. God has been reconciled, not for your repentance, and not for your tears and prayers, but for the sake of the great dear cross of Jesus. The preaching of the Gospel is the preaching of that atonement. The message of the preacher is: "God hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ," and his appeal is, "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead be ye reconciled to God." Our repentance, our confession, our tears, even our faith, are only acceptances of the mercy of God. The more clearly a man understands the love and grace of God in the sacrifice of Christ, the deeper, the truer, the more absorbing will his faith and repentance be. The godliest saint has the most poignant sorrow for sin. But neither his tears nor his faith has moved the heart of God to forgiveness. "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." And therefore the preacher's Gospel should be the story of the God and Father of Jesus Christ our Lord, who put away sins by the sacrifice of Himself, and the preacher's aptest figure may well be—the rent veil.

II.

The rent veil was a symbol of the passing away of the priest and his office — No devout and thoughtful Hebrew dreamed that God dwelt within the shrouding curtain of the Holy of Holies. He knew that the heaven of heavens could not contain Him. "Whither shall I go from Thy spirit? Thou hast beset me behind and before," was the cry of his enraptured heart. God could be seen in the bush that burned before the eyes of Moses, heard in the still small voice that spoke to Elijah, and spoken to in Samuel's midnight prayers. The Hebrew knew that the temple was built to make God accessible, to assure his fainting faith that in one place God had specially made himself known, and that there He was to be entreated for sin. But He also knew that he—the common Israelite on whom no consecrating oil had been poured, and even the priests who served the outer tabernacle—dared not pass into the Holy Place, and commune with God at His mercy-seat. One man, and one man only, could entreat with God for sin. But when the rent veil hung dissevered—a torn rag—it became the symbol that the Holy of Holies was open to all men —and that the priest and his office and ceremonies had passed away for ever.

It was not only the priests of the Old Testament, and the priests of Pan, of whom the old legend spoke, retold by Mrs Browning with a spiritual passion, who passed away when the hands of Jesus Christ, the world's one High Priest, "waved calm and consecration," but all priesthood for ever. The word itself should be made obsolete in Christian service and worship, since its innocence has been corrupted. Milton said that

presbyter was but priest writ large. His prejudice misled him. For priest is presbyter writ small, crushed out of recognisance. It has never been left in any rubric or become a term of common use among Christian men but the curse and tyranny of priestcraft have found entrance by its door. It misinterprets the work of Christ. It dishonours Him of His office. Truly there is a sense in which a man may exercise the priestly office for his fellow-men. He may pray for him to God, and plead with him for God, and truly there are men to whom God has given this special grace. But these are as often found among simple peasants, whose God-thirsty souls have drunk deep of the knowledge of God, as among those who have been called to the ministry of the Word. But when any man, learned or unlearned, ordained or unordained, asserts that he can do for a man what he cannot do for himself, that God has given him a right to stand and mediate for sin between a human soul and his Father, or any privilege of special entrance to God on behalf of his fellow-men, or any office of transmitting blessing through his rites or ceremonies, he is disloyal to the one only Priest, he is drifting from Christ, he is hanging up again the patched veil between God and man.

Ah, brethren, let us cast out the priest, and let us keep him out by maintaining and using the liberty and simplicity and spirituality of our access to God, given by Jesus in the hour of the rent veil. We are at times tempted to despise the ordained simplicity of Christian worship, and to escape from its demand for spirituality. It is native to our slothful hearts to bring back the temple and its courts again—to please our eyes and sodden our spirits with elaborate ritual and spectacular ceremonies. There is a place for things

beautiful in the worship of God, for the best and costliest and most lovely we can procure. But in Christian worship, with its supreme regard for liberty and spirituality, simplicity is a necessity, and the sensuous is always a peril. There is a danger, proved by experience, that the very means innocently and honestly devised to bring all heaven before our eyes, the solemn, pealing music, the thrilling voices of the well-trained choir, the stately pillars, the vaulted roof, the windows with their pictured emblems may shut out the sense of the presence of God. The hunger after formal ceremonies, gorgeous vestments, and solemn processions may be only a sign that spiritual realities have been fading from before our eyes. The truth ever overlooked is, that forms are not evil if they can be filled with meaning, but the more elaborate the ritual the greater is the devotion required, and the certainty is that the form will maintain itself, and may harden into an iron bond. Its tendency is to bring in a doctrine false to the free and spiritual worship of the Gospel. An elaborate ritual and a simple worship, in which all things are done decently and in order, cannot subsist together, and the simpler worship is in the end the more moving of the two.

The most devout statesman of the century, the man whose spirit was accustomed to worship in stately cathedrals and with a most ornate ritual, has given his testimony that the most solemn and impressive service he ever attended was in a barn in the south of Ireland, when they were but thirteen worshippers, and the preacher was a simple, unlettered man. And he has left it on record that no music could lift the soul nearer to God than that time-honoured hymn "Rock of Ages," sung by the voices

of a congregation of believing men. Let us stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again in any yoke of bondage to the priest and his ceremonies. Be it yours to remember that ye are a kingdom of priests, a royal priesthood. Be it yours to remember that "there is but one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus." Be it yours, when either man or rite or ritual comes between you and instant, constant, access to God, unconditioned by time or space, or by human will—to recall the veil of the Temple rent in twain from the top to the bottom.

How precious to a man to whom Jesus is Lord are these words! I hear them when I see a little child kneeling at his mother's knee and saying, "Our Father which art in heaven." I hear them in the pleading of the lonely worshipper in his secret approach to God, knowing himself to be in the Holy of Holies. I hear them in the sweet psalms of family worship, and in that exercise of the most solemn and most beautiful of all offices, when the "priest and father prays." I hear them from many a hillside and lonely moor and wind-swept seashore, where men have met to worship God in liberty of conscience, with only the awe in their hearts for the consecration of their sanctuary, the blue veil of heaven to suggest the infinite mercy of God, and its white clouds to represent the ascending incense of their prayers. I hear them again when I meet with the people of God in their house of prayer, remembering that His believing people are now the only temple on earth. I hear them most clearly of all when men meet to celebrate the feast of the supper, when bread and wine are passed from hand to hand, and there is no priest to presume and to bar the way

to God. And I hear the words ringing with the voice of apostolic condemnation, in those places of prayer where an altar has been built, and a priest stands within his privileged chancel, and exercises an office which Jesus abolished. Then as I look up, I see in imagination the veil rent in twain, and lament that men do not understand that the priest and his ceremonies have passed, for ever, away.

III.

The rent veil was a prophecy of the entrance at last, for all the people of God, into His eternal presence and communion.

"Which hope we have," says that mighty master of the Israel of God, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "as an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil, whither the Forerunner is for us entered—even Jesus." Jesus, in dying, did not only rend the veil, He passed within it. For when He took our flesh upon Him it became a veil between Him and God. He walked in the porch and vestibule of time without the temple of the heavenly presence. By faith and prayer, by the upward look, and by the midnight communion on the mount, He maintained His fellowship with the unseen God. His cross, like the altar of incense in the tabernacle, was built in the outer court. But when He bowed His head and gave up the Ghost, "the veil—that is to say His flesh" was rent in twain, and with His soft breathing, "Father into Thy hands I commend My Spirit," He passed within the veil. For forty days He "appeared" unto men, but it was but as the High Priest of their profession coming out of the presence of

God. The skin of His face shone, so that men who knew Him were awed and dazzled, because He looked on the unveiled glory of God. His life was now within the veil.

We also dwell yet in the outer court. There is a way into the Holiest of all not yet manifest to us. There is a vision of God no mortal eyes can see. The veil of flesh hangs between. "Now we see as in a glass darkly, but then face to face." "Now we know in part; then we shall know even as we are known." "His servants shall serve Him, and they shall see His face." At times we look into the eternal future and all is dark, and we chill with doubt and fear. At times men dream dreams of which they speak, and tell us of the visions of their imagination to comfort our hearts. But we have no need of such childish consolations. We have a more sure word of prophecy—the prophecy of the place prepared for us within the veil; the prophecy of the presence and communion of God. That is enough. It is not a leap in the dark we take; it is not a passing out in a darkness deeper than midnight "to inherit the vasty halls of death"; it is not even, as the unlit heart of the Jew expected, the shadow and dust of Sheol. Death is only the rending of the last veil, and we also shall pass in after our Forerunner, to see Him as He is—to be for ever with the Lord.

O Almighty and most Blessed and most Gracious God, who hast revealed Thyself in Him who veiled His Godhead that He might unveil Thy glory; and rent the veil of His flesh that by its sacrifice He might unveil Thy love and grace; and hast made Him the eternal sacrifice and only priest of men; grant that by the power of Thy

Holy Spirit the veil on our hearts may be taken away, and we may look on Him who loved us and gave Himself for us, and so be changed into the same image from glory to glory, until at last we shall see Him, with unveiled face for evermore. And to Thee, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, shall be the praise and glory for ever. Amen.

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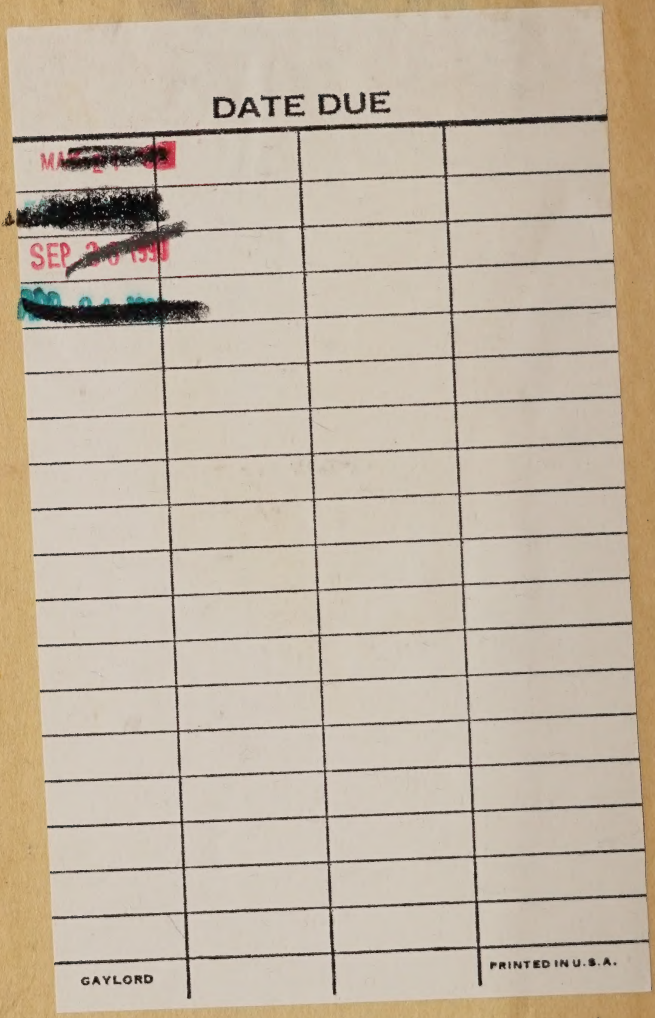
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